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thebridge *volume five*

thebridge
A STUDENT JOURNAL OF THE ARTS
volume five

ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

BSC

BRIDGEWATER STATE COLLEGE

the bridge

A STUDENT JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

volume five

ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

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BRIDGEWATER STATE COLLEGE

To

Mercedes Nuñez

Professor of Art

for

advising the advisors

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Mission Statement

The Bridge is produced and managed entirely by students. Our charge is to serve, as we are dedicated to showcasing the artistic talents of the student body while providing internships in both editing and graphic design. Our goal is to excel, as we wish to pay a debt to our alumni, keep a promise to ourselves, and set an example for our successors.

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Copyright Statement

The writers and visual artists have consented to have their work published in this volume of *The Bridge*; they have reserved all other rights. Works published in *The Bridge* are the property of the individual writers and visual artists and may not be reprinted or otherwise duplicated without their consent. Editors may submit work by following the established guidelines, but they are ineligible to win awards. Comments and inquiries can be sent to: thebridgejournal@bridgew.edu.

Introduction

This year's publication marks an improbable milestone: *The Bridge's* fifth anniversary. Many of the resources necessary to launch a venture such as this were simply not available to the founding editors. But Bridgewater State College students are competitive, determined, and dedicated—it is simply not in our character to abandon a goal within our reach, no matter how difficult the pursuit. It helped, too, that BSC students are gifted writers and visual artists, a fact borne out by the more than forty national honors and awards *The Bridge* has received during its relatively brief existence. With this proud history of tenacity and talent in mind, we could think of no better way to commemorate our fifth anniversary than by turning some of our attention to students from the past.

For the first time, we sponsored contests in both literature and visual art that were open to all BSC alumni. We were thrilled with the response, receiving hundreds of quality submissions that spanned several generations. Selecting our winners was a welcome challenge, and we are proud of all of our alumni who have maintained a connection with their alma mater while continuing to express themselves artistically.

In addition to the alumni contest, we are pleased to include an interview with Ms. Theresa Carmichael, a BSC alumna whose extraordinarily successful career in art conservation has led her back to our campus to tackle an exciting project. Ms. Carmichael, along with the other alumni showcased here, is a role model for those of us who dream of continuing our involvement in the arts long after our studies here are done.

But peers can be role models too, and this volume has no shortage of works by current students from which inspiration can be drawn. Once again, the journal received a tremendous number of submissions, all of which were carefully considered by each editor. Works were judged blindly, our sole concern being the merits of each individual piece. While we strove to be fair in our selection process, we recognized that it was in some ways unfair because we simply could not publish all of the excellent literature and visual art submissions that we received.

Needless to say, choosing what to include was not easy. In fact, nothing about producing this journal was. For that reason, we are indebted to a great many people and departments for aiding us with their generosity and dedication.

First, we must thank the Bridgewater State College Foundation, the Office of the President, and the Office of the Provost for their continued financial support. We also must thank the faculty and staff for all of their support. In particular, we'd like to thank the Department of Art, which has for five years allowed us use of its facilities and equipment, sometimes at the imposition of its students. As usual, we received wonderful advice and support from alumni consultants, Ms. Linda Hall and Ms. Rosann Kozlowski. And of course we would be remiss if we failed to sincerely thank our advisors, Dr. Jerald Walker and Professor Mary Dondero, who have consistently steered student editors to success. Their dedication to the college is unmatched; to us, invaluable.

Finally, we are as always indebted to Bridgewater State College students, past and present, who have made possible *The Bridge's* fifth anniversary.

The Editors
April, 2008



Bianca Nicole Fontenault
Drawing · Ink · 18 in × 24 in



The Rose

Alexandra Carvario

Nonfiction



Wind rips at the flowers draped across the casket waiting to be lowered into the ground. Beneath a black tarp erected by the funeral home, a priest, whose name I don't know and won't bother to find out, drones on about my late uncle, whom he never actually met. Mourners huddle together, trying to squeeze under the tarp or beneath umbrellas, lest they get soaked by the freezing, windblown rain. The news is predicting blizzard conditions later in the night.

I stand away from everyone, my sharp heels sinking into the earth, making keeping my balance a challenge. I refuse the umbrellas and the tarp. The rain runs through my hair and across my skin, drenching everything. The metallic, almost sweet taste of my blood swirls around my mouth; my teeth are chattering so uncontrollably, I've bitten my tongue. I realize I can't feel my toes anymore. My ears, on the other hand, I can feel. They hurt so badly, I think they might fall off.

Still, I stay right where I am. As the priest launches into a prayer to some saint, read straight out of a leather-bound black book that isn't the Bible, I turn my palms up to catch the water. Above me, fierce gray clouds boil and roll. My dress, some cheap, black, Wal-Mart thing I bought last night, clings to me as if it too were made of water. I close my eyes as the rain pounds my upturned face.

I know I am alive because I am cold. I know I'm alive because I can feel the rain beating against my skin. I know I'm alive because I can feel anything at all. I wonder what it would be like to be dead. I wonder what it's like to be my uncle now.

When I open my eyes, the priest has finally stopped talking. People are wandering back toward the waiting cars that line the cracked, narrow road winding through the cemetery. A few people linger. My stepmother kisses her hand and places it against the coffin. She takes a white rose off one of the large arrangements and then leans on my father as they make their way back to their emerald-green Buick.

"I'll see you at my house, sweetie," she calls to me, her voice like sandpaper.

I nod and climb slowly up the hill back to the coffin, going against the tide of people hurrying to get out of the rain. A lot of disapproving looks come my way. I ignore them. If I want to be the crazy girl standing in the rain, then I'll be the crazy girl standing in the rain.

My brother is leaning over the polished wood, whispering to it. His red hair looks brown where it is soaked and plastered to his skull. The pallor of his skin makes him seem almost translucent. Slowly, he stands up, aware that this moment is no longer private.

"Take some flowers or something," my brother says, turning to me. "William would be pissed so many people sent him flowers. He'd have been mad we even had a funeral." And then he adds, "You looked like an ass standing out there in the rain by yourself, just so you know. I'll wait for you in the car."

I let him amble off down the hill, to the waiting Ford pickup, probably made the first year they made Fords. In the distance, I hear an engine start. It belongs to something big, something heavy, maybe a backhoe coming to shovel dirt down on my uncle. There's a little cold place deep inside me, like a swallowed ice cube. The little cold place starts to grow, until my chest seems too tight for me to breathe and my pulse hammers in my ears.

My uncle is dead. He is in that box. I am alive, but someday it will be me in a box just the same, with the backhoes idling in the distance, waiting for the living to be gone so they can put me underground. Someday it will be me. Impulsively, I grab a rose, vivid blood-red, and jog down the hill towards my brother. A jagged thorn rips into my finger, but I hold onto that rose as if it is a talisman to ward off evil.

My brother leans across the torn seat to shove the door open for me. It only opens from the inside and only closes if you say just the right combination of curses and prayers while slamming it repeatedly. There's a similar combination required to start the engine. Today, though, the door cooperates and shuts on only the fourth slam.

"Lock it just in case," my brother says. He shifts back and forth from neutral to drive three times before the truck agrees that it is time to leave.

The rumbling of the old truck soothes me as I let myself sink into the worn seat. The springs dig into my back in some places, but shifting around lets me find something resembling comfort for the long drive to my father and stepmother's house in Brockton. I even venture to kick off my heels, despite the fact that I have no idea what might be living or growing beneath the trash strewn about the truck's floor. The blisters on the sides of my feet throb.

For a long time, we drive in silence. Hot air blasts from the vents, combating the growing fog on the windshield. The rain pummeling the car keeps a steady rhythm, and I can almost sleep, almost. My head gently bumps against the cool glass of the

window as the truck navigates a poorly-paved road. Eyes closed, I let my finger trace the contours of the rose now lying in my lap, a beautiful reminder of where I just was.

"He didn't want that. They shouldn't have done it. We shouldn't have gone," my brother mutters after a long time. He's still angry that my aunts violated my uncle's will by having a funeral service at all, and by burying him. He wanted to be cremated, scattered, and that was it.

After a long moment of silence, during which I decide not to have the same debate with my brother for the ten thousandth time, I ask, "Have you ever heard of the Parsis?"

"No. What does that have to do with anything?" he demands. Then, after a moment; "What are they?"

"They're a people. They're from India...I think. They practice this thing called open-air burial. When someone dies, they just leave them."

"What do you mean they just leave them?" he snaps, clearly impatient with me.

"I mean they just leave them. They put them on top of some hill or tower or something and just leave them for nature."

"That's kind of weird," he mutters, reaching for the radio, probably to drown me out because, clearly, I am no good for conversation.

"Anyway, when I die, that's what I want. I want everyone to take me out into the woods, somewhere where people won't find me. I want them to take me out there and just leave me. I want to be alone where it's quiet."

"I think it'll probably be pretty quiet no matter where you are," he points out. "Seeing as you'll be dead."

"And what if there's some lingering piece of me still rattling around inside what used to be my brain? What if I could still see or hear, even just a little bit? I don't want to be under a pile of dirt in the dark, and I don't want a bunch of people making noise around me for all of eternity."

"So you'd rather be conscious of being left in the woods and some animal eating you? Because that's what would happen; you know that, right?"

I shrug. He's probably right there. Still, images of piles of dirt and backhoes dance in my brain, and I like the woods idea much better. Not that there's any reason why I should be considering this, but I can't seem to stop.

"Well, what do you want to be done when you die?" I ask him after another long silence.

"I don't know. I guess I want to be cremated."

"Cremated? Why cremated? Doesn't the thought of being burned bother you?"

"Yeah, actually this whole conversation bothers me. Normal people don't talk about this stuff unless they have to, and you don't have to."

"I'm not normal."

"I know that, and I love you anyway, but could we please change the subject?"

"Just put on the radio."

He does. Some angry rock song about some ex-girlfriend blares out of the speakers. My rose, almost forgotten, trembles in my lap. Tiny droplets of water shimmer and slide off its leaves and onto the half-dry fabric of my skirt clinging to my legs. The rose looks as though it's shedding tear-like jewels. I tear off a petal and crush it between my thumb and forefinger before letting it fall onto the floor amongst the trash. A pale, sweet smell lingers on my skin as we pull into my stepmother's narrow driveway and park beneath an old oak tree, gnarled branches towering to the sky in ancient, barren splendor.

Having returned my shoes to my feet, I limp up the driveway to the front door, crunching across an ocean of gravel. At one point, I have to grab a fistful of my brother's black jacket to steady myself. Finally, we reach the front door, light leaking out from underneath it like a beacon.

Inside is like an oven, an oven that reeks of cigarette smoke and something that smells vaguely like pumpkin pie. My stepmother is hunched over the kitchen table, chain-smoking and burning leftover Halloween candles. There are candles everywhere: on the windowsills, on the stove, the table, the counter, and just about any other surface that isn't already cluttered with something. Their

light flickers and dances in hypnotic rhythm. If I didn't know better, I'd say we had just missed some kind of impromptu séance.

I bend over and kiss my stepmother's cheek, a bare brushing of skin that's more out of obligation than affection. Her deeply-tanned, wrinkled skin is soft as a baby's beneath my lips, even though it looks as if it should feel like old leather. The smell of raspberries and smoke lingers about her like a fragrant halo.

"Let me get you guys something to eat," she says, clambering heavily out of her chair, leaving her cigarette burning in a Betty Boop ashtray. She turns a deaf ear to our protests that we aren't hungry. We'll eat something whether we like it or not, even if she has to go through every cabinet in her kitchen until she finds something we like.

We agree to plates of leftover ham and mashed potatoes simply because she offers them first, and it seems like it will require the least effort on her part. I take my plate and settle at the kitchen table to pick at the salty meat and shove the potatoes around with a fork.

"What's with the candles, Michele?" my brother asks her.

"When someone dies you're supposed to light a candle for them so they can find their way back. You didn't know that?" She gets this look on her face as if he just told her that he was unaware that the sky was blue.

"No, sorry, that one's new to me." He shrugs and goes back to his ham.

"Why would you want the dead to come back? I mean, they're dead. If they could come back, wouldn't they not really belong here anymore?" I slip a piece of ham off the table and onto the floor for Toto, the mop-like dog waiting eagerly at my feet.

"Well, you love them, so you want them to visit." She lights another cigarette with the dying ember of the first. There are three more unopened packs stacked neatly in the center of the table. I'd bet money that by morning, my father will have to go to the store to buy more.

I don't respond. It's true that I love my uncle, but no matter how much I love him, I don't think I'd

be very excited if his disembodied spirit showed up for a chat. I think I'd probably die of a heart attack on the spot, and then she'd be lighting candles for me. The image of my uncle's ghost floating through my bedroom window rises behind my eyes, and I shiver.

My father lumbers into the room on arthritic limbs. He claps my brother roughly on the back, making him wince. When he ruffles my matted hair, his fingers get caught in the snarls, forcing him to yank them free. He plops down in the chair next to my stepmother and lights his own cigarette. A cloud of blue-black smoke swirls toward the ceiling, bathing the room in more unhealthy haze.

"I meant to call him," my father mumbles, red, blood-shot eyes staring past us all. My Uncle William had been his baby brother. "I meant to call him a hundred times, and I never got around to it. I just kept putting it off. I can't believe it's too late."

"I missed his call," I whisper.

My father turns intense hazel eyes onto my face. "What?"

"He called me the morning he died. I missed the call. I was at work. It was maybe a half hour before he had the heart attack, and I missed the call. He called me in the middle of the day on his cell phone from his new job. It had to be important or else he would've waited to call until he got home. And I missed it."

For a moment everyone sits in silence. For the first time all day, I think I might cry. Tears burn at the backs of my eyes, threatening to spill over no matter how hard I fight them. I will not cry. I hate to cry. It accomplishes nothing except to give me a pounding headache and runny nose.

"You weren't meant to get that call," my stepmother chimes in with absolute certainty. "You were only supposed to know that he was thinking of you."

I want to tell her that that is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. I don't though. I know she means everything she says no matter how crazy it sounds to everyone else.

"Did I tell you about the knock at the door?" she asks everyone. We all obediently shake our heads "No" so that she can go on with her story.

"Well, the night William died, your father was out on a call, and I was home all by myself. All of a sudden there was a knock at the door. I answered it, but no one was there. Right after I shut the door, the phone rang, and it was your father calling to tell me he just got the call from your aunt, and William was dead. That knock was your uncle, just passing by."

She smiles as if she's proved the existence of God, Satan, Heaven and Hell all in one single story. My brother rolls his eyes at me when he's sure she's not looking at him. I nod in agreement. Still, we all glance uneasily at the door as if expecting some phantom knock. It doesn't come like it would in some bad horror movie. But still we wait, a little on edge.

"It's time to go," my brother finally says after a long moment of smoky silence. He pushes away from the table and rises. I follow because I have to. He's my ride home after all. I would rather sleep on the couch, surrounded by candles and benign ghost stories, than venture out into the cold air and the wind howling in the dark, and the threat of snow. That's not an option, so it's back on with my painful shoes and back out the front door.

It takes eight tries to start the truck, and it sounds decidedly unwell when it sputters to life. When my brother tries to shift gears it coughs once and then falls silent. No matter what he tries, it can't be revived. He goes and gets my father. After poking around under the hood for a long time, he shakes his head.

"Call a tow truck in the morning. You guys can sleep on the couch." He waves us back inside.

I crawl into the truck to retrieve my abandoned rose from the front seat. I cradle it carefully against my chest to shield it from the wind that tugs at my hair and skirt.

An hour later, my brother snores on the living room floor, his suit jacket and shirt cast over a chair in the corner. I lay, nestled in a cocoon of blankets, clad in a borrowed nightgown four sizes too big, on the couch with the dog.

My uncle smiles at me from a framed picture on the wall. He smiles at me from a picture on the coffee table surrounded by candles, their flames slowly burning out. Somewhere, he's in

a box under the dirt in the howling wind. And I wonder again what it feels like. I wonder what lesson I'm supposed to learn from all this. In all those inspirational stories, people always come away from these things a different person, with some life-altering positive message to share with the world. No matter how far down in my soul I search, there is no lesson. I am the same person. Nothing makes sense.

All I know is I am alive and my uncle is not. This isn't an inspirational story. It's life. It just happens. Tomorrow I will go on living, and my uncle will go on being dead. Time will pass. I'll get used to living without him.

I twirl my rose between my fingers as I wait for sleep to come. One by one, I pluck the petals off and grind them to pulp until it seems sweetness overwhelms the room. Tomorrow morning, I will still be me, but there will be something else with me that has no name, like a ghost waiting outside to knock while the candles burn out in the dark. In the hall, a clock chimes the hour that's slipped away into the ether. Outside, snow begins to fall and blanket the earth in silence.





Untitled Jason R. Gregory
Photography · Large Format Black and White · 16 in × 20 in
Featured on Cover

Role Model

Amber Rhilinger

Poetry

You're just like your father.

The words taste acidic but sweet on my lips.

Your eyes, usually cloudless and bright
now a shadowy, navy blue.
Crimson cheeks and gritted teeth.

Your fist clenches tighter around the bottle,
white knuckles contrasting with a red Budweiser label.
The kind your father always drank.

Some things are unforgivable.
I let a spiteful smile slither across my mouth.

A look of anguish.
Not really the reaction I was expecting. Where's the yelling?
Only silence—suffocating both of us.

For a moment, I feel remorseful,
but it's a fleeting moment. One that ends with you
taking a long swig. A callous chuckle escapes my throat.
And you say you're nothing like him.





Untitled Jenna Doyle
Photography · 35mm Black and White · 10 in × 8 in





Untitled Sarah Haag
Drawing · Charcoal · 36 in × 24 in



what it is

Colleen Farrell

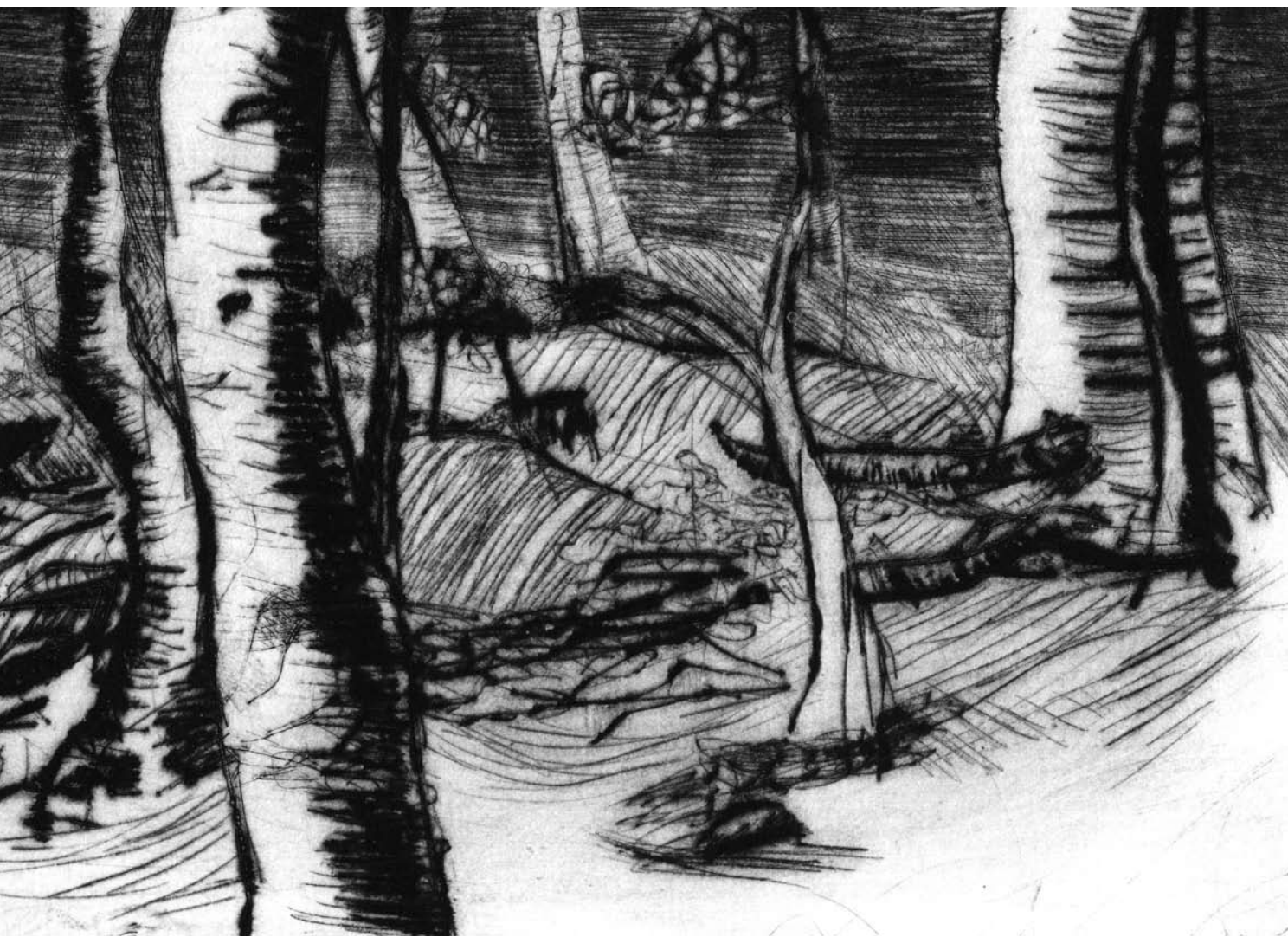
Poetry

The black thread stitches stuck out of the scar
on the back of my cousin's neck like snakes
wrapping down his spine. I grilled burgers
as he told us how the surgeons
picked up each muscle, stacking them sideways
as though they were raw slabs of bacon. The tumor;
a floret of broccoli. They left the stem.
His right vocal cord is paralyzed. He speaks
in scratched tones now, like a muffled John Wayne.
His neck is stiff like palms before Ash Wednesday.

He smiled. *You all right, Beanie?*
Yes. I said. *You want any bacon on your burger?*

Woods Bernadette J. Bossé
Printmaking · Drypoint · 10.75 in × 3.75 in





Deep Water

Kate E. Pesanelli

Fiction



It was four o'clock and Jay smiled as Dave, the owner of the Sea Side Motel in Maine, was leaving for the evening. It was Jay's fourth year working as the night desk clerk in his hometown, which was a popular tourist spot in the summertime. Since it was a Tuesday in July, all the rooms were already booked for the week. Most of the guests had checked in over the weekend, leaving the thirty-three-year-old with little to do. He straightened the rack of brochures by the office door, and then made a fresh pot of coffee. He continued to move around the lobby, fluffing the pillows on the worn chenille couches in front of the television, until he was certain that Dave wasn't coming back because he forgot something. Then Jay posted the "No Vacancy" sign on the office door, happy with the knowledge that he would be free to watch the Red Sox game at seven o'clock.

After wiping the windows with a rag, Jay sauntered around the reservations desk, dropping his short, stocky body on the desk chair. He drummed his fingers on the laminate desktop. The desk was furnished with a computer, portable boom box, switchboard telephone, the reservations book, community bulletins, local maps, some pencils, and stationary. Jay flipped through the reservations book to be certain there were no departures scheduled for later in the evening. Smiling, he shut the book and turned on the radio. The sound of classical music filled the office. Jay wrinkled his nose before tuning the dial to a popular rock station. Bobbing his head to a Jimi Hendrix tune, he rummaged through the desk drawer. He fumbled through keys and parking permits until he finally found what he was searching for. It was a handwritten sign that read: "Back in 5 minutes." He grabbed the sign and locked the drawer, since it also contained the cashbox. Jay crossed the lobby and stopped to turn the air conditioner on full blast before tacking the sign to the door.

Jay turned the corner and headed toward the back of the motel to see if Dave's twenty-eight-year-old nephew Ricky, a tall, brawny guy with a scar over his right eyebrow, was there. Ricky worked as the maintenance man and usually spent his shift in the tool shed fixing broken air conditioners and smoking pot. The gravel parking lot crunched under Jay's sneakers and produced clouds of dust as he walked. Up ahead he saw Ricky painting a new door propped up against the side of the tool shed.

"Yo! Ricky!" Jay approached the shed. The humid air caused his twill shorts to stick to his legs with each step.

Ricky turned around and waved. "Hey, man," he said, standing up straight, wiping his brow. "Hot as hell out here today. Even in the shade."

"I know, man." Jay leaned on the shed.

Ricky checked his watch. "Dave leave?"

"Yup."

Ricky grinned, his smile wide on his long, thin face. "I got some good bud. You wanna take a look?" He wiped the end of his brush, allowing globs of paint to drop back into the paint can before he laid the brush across the top of it.

"No, I know what it looks like, but I'll take a puff," Jay joked.

Ricky thrust the shed door open wide so it pushed a few broken air conditioners and dusty, old televisions stacked on the floor against the wall. Ricky went inside first, tiptoeing around some broken glass that he hadn't bothered to sweep up. He reached for an aluminum toolbox sitting on a high shelf and flipped up the lid, removing a sandwich baggie half-full of bright green marijuana.

Jay went inside and ducked under a rake hanging from the roof beam. He took the bag, opened it, and inhaled deeply. Smiling at the pleasant woodsy odor, he reached into his back pocket for his wallet. He pulled out a couple of ten-dollar bills for Ricky and a sheet of flimsy cigarette paper. Jay scanned the shed for a place to dump out some of the pot, but there wasn't one; paint cans and coffee cans full of nails were stacked on every available flat surface.

Ricky took the money and handed Jay a scrap of plywood. Jay selected two plump buds and broke them up on the plywood before sprinkling the loose bits into the paper. Using both of his thumbs and index fingers, he twisted the delicate paper into a thin joint.

"Pedro's pitching tonight," Ricky said. "You gonna watch?"

"Yeah, of course. This is the year, man; the Sox are gonna win the pennant," Jay said. He held up the joint and studied his handiwork before lighting it. Jay took a few puffs before passing it to Ricky.

"I'm gonna bail early," Ricky said, "but don't say anything to Dave. I've got a date with the chick from East Coast Bank." He took several drags off the joint and coughed a little. Using his foot, Ricky slid a television with a shattered screen out of his way. He stepped outside. Clouds of smoke drifted from the shed and hung in the muggy air.

Jay started coughing and stepped out of the shed. "Yeah? Where're you guys going?"

Using the flat handle of the paintbrush, Ricky sealed the lid on the paint can. He dropped his brush into a coffee can filled with murky water. "Booze Cruise on the harbor. Ladies drink for free." Ricky nodded and grinned.

"Classy," Jay sneered.

Ricky spit on the ground. "I'm a classy kind of guy." He shut the door to the shed and fastened the padlock on the handle. "You'll be cool, right?"

"Oh, yeah, it'll be dead except for one of those cheap TVs shitting the bed or some jerk losing his dollar in the vending machine. I'm sure I'll manage without you." Jay smoked the joint until it burned down to his fingertips and seared his thumb a little.

Before parting ways, Ricky raised his fist and Jay tapped it with his own. "I'll tell you all about it tomorrow," Ricky said. Even if he hadn't said so, Jay knew that Ricky would tell him, or anyone within earshot, without being asked.

Leaving Ricky to finish cleaning up, Jay sauntered around to the front of the property. He made his way to the fenced patio area facing the harbor. Popsicle sticks, cellophane wrappers, and soda cans were strewn around. Two pre-teen boys were splashing in the kidney-shaped pool. Jay glared at the boys as he pushed open the wooden gate, walking across the patio to collect the litter.

One boy, shorter and skinnier than his companion, climbed up the pool ladder and out of the water. He removed a pair of goggles, letting them hang around his neck, and grabbed a towel draped over the back of a lounge chair. He wrapped the towel around his shoulders.

The bigger boy scrambled out of the pool, snatching the towel away and spinning it around over his head like a lariat. With a flick of the wrist, he whipped the other boy's belly. The smaller boy let out a yelp before dashing across the patio and crouching behind a lounge chair. The bigger boy raced to catch him, but he tripped over a rubber flip-flop.

Jay didn't see him hit the ground, but he heard the boy's wail. The boy gingerly lifted himself up off the ground. The cement was streaked with blood.

The boy's skin had been torn away on both knees, and a long scrape ran along his forearm. A small abrasion on his chin dripped blood onto his pastel green swim trunks, leaving a strawberry-shaped stain. Jay noticed the other boy peeking around the back of the chair with his mouth agape. Not wanting to get involved, Jay exited through the gate to deposit the garbage into a trashcan. He continued along the side of the property, heading for the office. He waved to Ricky speeding by on his motorcycle.

Jay pulled the sign off of the office door and went inside. He didn't bother to answer the ringing phone. When the ringing ceased the room seemed unusually quiet, even with the radio on. Standing in the center of the room, Jay glanced around, raking his hand through his short, curly hair. The hum of the ice machine sounded louder than usual. As he crossed the room to check it out, Jay realized it was because the air conditioner wasn't buzzing too. Grumbling to himself, he pushed the on/off switch to no avail. He returned to his post behind the desk with a defeated sigh, even though Ricky had taught him how to patch up the cooling element for a quick, temporary fix.

Trying to ignore the uncomfortable heat, Jay took a pencil and absently drew caricatures on motel stationary. He sketched Ricky riding his motorcycle, smoking an oversized joint. He picked up the drawing and tilted his head to one side as he examined it, holding the pencil between his teeth. Not quite satisfied, he touched the graphite pencil tip to his tongue and then sketched a girl with long hair streaming behind her on the back of the bike. Jay was admiring his design when the little boy he'd seen at the pool opened the lobby door. Barefoot and wrapped in a white motel towel, he was holding two damp and wrinkled dollar bills.

After asking Jay for change, the boy said, "I'm getting snacks to bring to the concert."

Jay counted eight quarters out of the cashbox and handed them to the child. "Oh, yeah?" He knew the town philharmonic held outdoor concerts on the waterfront each week during the summer. "What're you gonna get?"

"I like gummy worms," the boy replied. "Gummy sharks and gummy fish, too."

"I like the fish too," Jay said.

The boy stood at the counter with his change in his fist, his wet trunks dripping onto the worn carpeting.

Feeling obligated, Jay asked, "How's your friend doing? Still bleeding?"

The boy pulled the towel taut over his shoulders. "Fine. Why didn't you do anything?"

Jay stared blankly at him. "Like what? There was nothing I could do."

The boy shrugged. "You could've done something," he said.

"But it was nothing," Jay protested. He stopped himself before saying anything more; he didn't want to argue with a child.

The boy shrugged and then scampered out with his change.

Jay slumped down in his chair and rubbed his temples. Knowing the boy was probably right irritated Jay a little. Shrugging off his frustration, he reached under the desk for his backpack. He rummaged through it and fished out a Jerky Boys cassette tape. After popping the tape into the boom box, Jay kicked his feet up onto the desk, knocking several of the community bulletins to the floor. He groaned and reached down and picked them up, tossing them haphazardly back onto the corner of the desk. He leaned back in his chair and idly flipped through one while listening to the comedy tape. A bold-print advertisement caught his eye. It read: "Like to Draw?" Slightly intrigued, he read on. It was an ad for the Bar Harbor Evening Practical Arts Program. A drawing course was beginning in a couple of weeks. For a few minutes he contemplated enrolling, but then realized that he'd have to change up his schedule first. Knowing he'd have to work some days in order to attend an evening course, Jay reconsidered. He wasn't sure that was something he was willing to do, since the dayshift at the motel was often hectic with check-ins and check-outs. When he first started at the Sea Side, Jay worked the dayshift alongside Dave. During the first year of his employment Jay was enthusiastic, learning as much as he could about management from Dave. He especially enjoyed meeting new people traveling from other parts of the country and the world. In fact, he even thought he might like to become a

hotel manager. But when the night clerk quit, Dave needed someone to fill in temporarily, so Jay volunteered. The first few nights were insufferably boring and lonely. Jay missed eating lunch with Dave, booking reservations, planning tours and balancing the accounting books. Nevertheless, after just a few weeks he realized, though he would never admit it, that it was easier to be less diligent. He grew comfortable with the slow pace and content with having fewer responsibilities, so he offered to continue working as the evening clerk.

Staring at the advertisement, Jay didn't realize that the whole side of the cassette had played until it clicked off, startling him out of his haze. He wasn't high anymore, just hot and very thirsty. He still felt undecided about changing his hours, so he tore out the ad and stuffed it into his backpack. He checked his watch; it was only five-thirty. He hung his head in frustration. The game wouldn't start for another hour and a half and his shift wasn't over until eleven.

Jay reached into the desk drawer and pulled out the "I Heart ME" key ring that held all the master keys. He tacked up his "Back in 5 Minutes" sign and left to get a soda. Out front, Jay unlocked the door to the soda machine with the master key, reached inside and pulled a ginger ale from the dispenser. He pressed the cold can to his forehead before popping the top and taking a sip.

"Excuse me." A woman's voice interrupted Jay's break.

He turned around. It was an older woman balancing a lawn chair under one arm, her purse in one hand, and a plastic cup in the other. She was smiling at Jay. He noticed three other women standing behind her, each holding their own lawn chair and plastic cup. "Yeah?" he said hesitantly.

"Could you kindly help us carry our chairs across the street?" the woman asked.

Jay sighed. He took a long swig from the can. "Across the street? Yeah, all right," he groaned. He placed his soda can on top of the machine and reached out, taking all four of the lawn chairs. Awkwardly carrying two chairs under each arm, he followed the women through the crosswalk to the lawn in front of the harbor, where a stage was set up for the philharmonic concert. A loud crescendo of classical music filled the air. The orchestra was seated on the stage and warming up, signaling that the concert was about to start.

The women pointed and argued about where to sit. Finally, to Jay's relief, they decided on a nearby spot. One of the women held out a dollar bill. Jay took it and mumbled, "Thanks."

Jay crossed the street and when he returned to the motel property, he was sweltering from the heat. Instead of going back to the office, he went to the patio and pushed open the pool gate. Standing at the ledge of the deep end, he yanked off his T-shirt and kicked off his sneakers. Jay emptied his pockets. He put his keys, bag of weed, and wallet in one of his sneakers before tossing them in the general vicinity of the patio table. He raised his arms above his head and then dove into the cold water. He glided along the bottom, eventually coming up gasping for air at the other end. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head to get the water out of his ears. Feeling refreshed, he pushed his body off the tile wall for momentum, swimming with his head above the surface back to the deep end. Pulling himself up the ledge, he climbed out.

Not bothering to towel off, Jay went to retrieve his sneakers, leaving wet footprints on the concrete. Standing in his soaking wet shorts, he thought to himself how he would spend the next couple of hours alone at work. He knew he'd have to stay at the desk for the majority of the evening, so he decided to stay outside until he was dry, before the evening's patrons started bugging him for fresh towels or wake-up calls.

Letting out a sigh, he made his way to the large wooden fence that blocked the view of the waterfront. He draped his arms over the top of the fence and looked out at the harbor through the Vs formed by the pickets. The orange sun was slowly dropping into the horizon, bathing the boats and docks in a fiery glow. The returning pleasure cruise sounded its loud, low bellow as it headed for shore. As the boat's horn faded out, a new sound replaced it. Hearing the roaring whine of Jet Skis, Jay craned his head over the fence to see them.

In the distance, a group of four jet skiers bobbed over their own wakes, racing around boats and each other, their engines revving as each took turns slaloming between the fluorescent buoys that marked the harbor's depths. Two women and two men zipped in toward the shore, moving closer to the docks. As they approached the shoreline, Jay could clearly see the women waving and yelling back and forth, traveling closer together.

One woman riding a green Jet Ski zigzagged around the other woman, whose long, blonde ponytail streamed behind her. Waving to one of the men, the blonde woman sped away from the dock. As she changed her course, turning out, the nose of her vehicle crashed into the side of the green Jet Ski. Upon impact, the woman on the green vehicle was launched off her seat. She flew several feet through the air before her body slammed into the side wall of a motor boat. The boat, the Lucky Dog, was on an outbound course and traveling at a fast clip. The woman floated on the waves before sinking in the deep water.

“What the fuck?” Jay shouted, surprising himself. He turned his head left, right, left and right again, looking up and down the waterfront. Close by, two girls were engrossed in a conversation, moving their hands as they talked. A thunderous round of applause erupted as the orchestra finished a composition. The four Jet Skis idled, the green one floating upside down with the motor kicking up foam and spitting gasoline into the air. The three riders were motionless. The Lucky Dog was stopped and starting to drift backwards with the current. The man operating the boat began shouting for help. As if startled into action by the shouting, two of the riders dove into the water and swam toward the boat. Taken aback, Jay stood, watching the chaos unfold.

Within minutes, the wail of ambulance and police sirens carried across the waterfront. The first police cruiser at the scene parked sideways across the street in front of the harbor. Another police car and a motorcycle followed, obstructing another section of the street. Emergency technicians climbed out of the ambulance and sprinted down the shoreline with their medical kits.

Wanting to get a better look, Jay ducked down and squeezed through a hole where a few pickets were missing from the fence. He jogged across the street and took a place on the sidewalk, standing with twenty or so other onlookers.

A Coast Guard ship now floated near the idling Lucky Dog. A diver, wearing a navy wetsuit and an oxygen tank, stepped off the boat and plummeted into the harbor. A ring of foamy bubbles rose to the surface.

Seconds passed. A buzz of panic moved through the crowd. The diver came to the surface, waving. Another diver jumped in. A hefty tarp was lowered

from the boat. Grasping the edges, both divers disappeared beneath the waves with it. Pushing forward, Jay passed one man taking a little girl by the hand, leading her away from the scene.

A police officer, holding a walkie-talkie, shouted at the crowd, “Move back! Move back! Clear the street!” Sidestepping around the foremost onlookers, Jay watched two technicians carrying a stretcher run down a gangplank leading to the Coast Guard ship. The ramp bounced under them. Jay felt a hand on his shoulder. He spun around. It was a police officer.

“I said clear out. No spectators,” the officer warned. Jay muttered an apology before retreating back to the motel property.

Yet again leaning on the fence, Jay watched as the technicians carried the stretcher to the waiting ambulance. Most of the crowd had left the area; there was nothing more to see, but he lingered until the ambulance’s taillights disappeared down the street. He paced around the pool a few times trying to collect his thoughts, catching a glimpse of his reflection on the water. Of course he had known that accidents and death could come about at any moment, but seeing it happen distressed him.

The Red Sox game had already begun when Jay returned to office and turned on the television. Sitting on the old couch, which smelled a little moldy, he stared vacantly, straight ahead, out the window at the harbor front. A police cruiser with the lights on was still parked on the street. He watched the officer leaning against the car, scribbling in his notebook. Wondering what the policeman was writing to document the events, Jay thought to himself that he didn’t know how he could communicate it to anyone.

A few minutes passed before the office door opened. “Hey!” Ricky exclaimed as he walked in. Smiling and a little unsteady on his feet, Ricky made his way to the couch. “What’s the score, man?”

Turning away from the window, Jay stared blankly at Ricky. “Uh, it’s,” Jay checked the score on the screen, “no score.”

Ricky flopped down on the couch opposite Jay, kicking his legs up over the armrest and crossing his ankles. “The cruise rocked, but my date went home. She said she wasn’t feeling so hot,” Ricky explained.

Jay stared at the television.

"Did you hear about the accident?" Ricky asked.

"Yeah," Jay replied.

"The jet skier?"

"Yeah."

"I heard that's Dr. Morrison's boat. He works at the hospital with my sister," Ricky said. "I heard the lady's body snapped in two."

"No," said Jay.

"What?"

"It didn't." Jay rubbed his temples.

"Did you see anything?" Ricky asked.

Staring at the television, Jay let out a sigh. "Yup."

"No way."

"Yeah." Jay picked the frayed hem of his shorts.

Ricky stopped reclining and sat up straight to face Jay. "Tell me."

Jay shifted in his seat. He leaned back into the couch, resting one arm across the back. Jay glanced at Ricky then back at the television. "Man, you have no idea. You just don't know." Jay shook his head.

"That must have been pretty cool," Ricky mused. After a lull, he added, "I mean, intense, really."

"Intense," Jay said absently. He strained to think of words to say. "It was something, all right. It was something." Jay shook his head.

"So, tell me," Ricky pressed.

Jay looked surprised. "I just did."





Hollow Stephen O. Johansen
Photography · Digital · 5 in × 7 in

Vista Cheryl Tullis
Photography · Digital · 7 in x 5 in



Crab Apple Sunset

Christin Hedman

Printmaking · Oil Woodcut · 16 in × 12 in



I Am Uncertain

Kelly LaBlue

Printmaking · Screenprint · 30 in × 44 in



Nude Male Reclining **Tania Henry**
Drawing · Charcoal and White Conté · 24 in × 18 in





Foundation Series:
Holding

Lisa Arnold

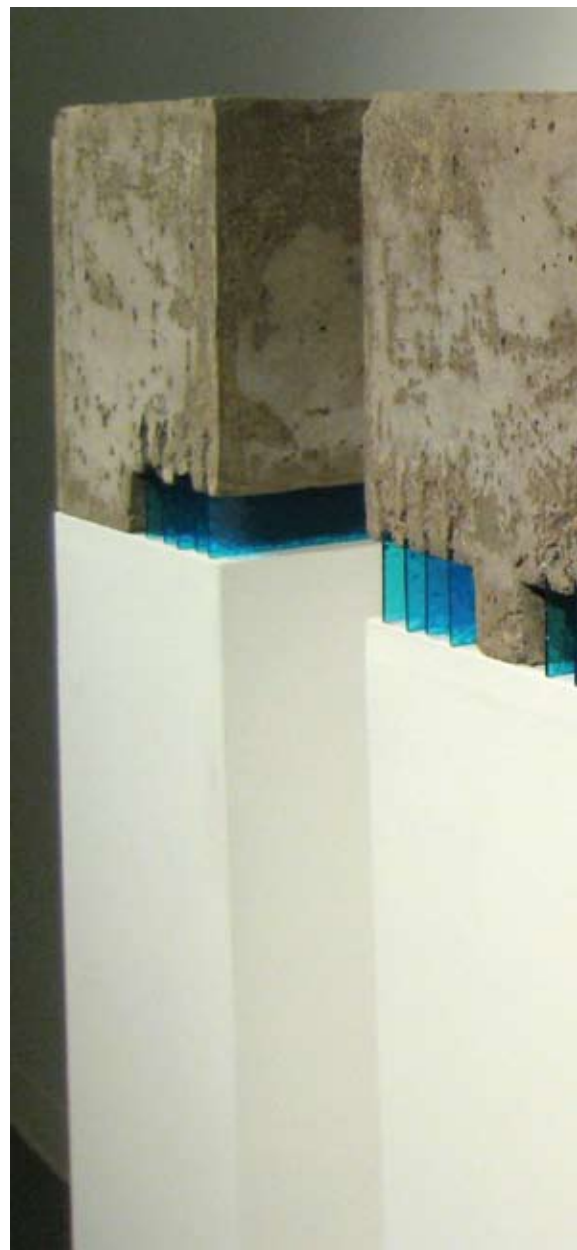
Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · 8 in × 11 in × 8 in

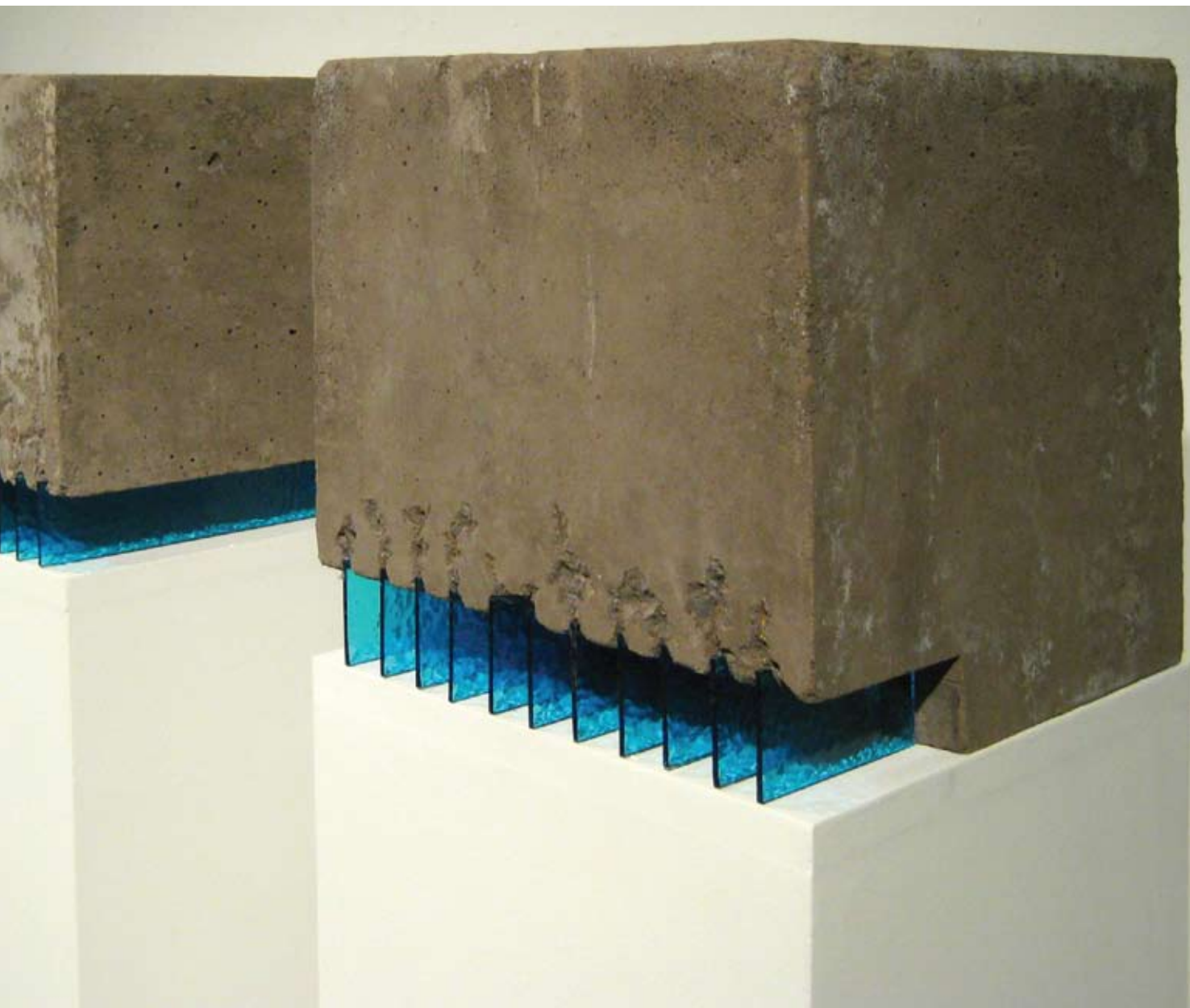
ALUMNI AWARD

A Quiet Collapse

David George, Jr.

Three-Dimensional · Concrete and Glass · 60 in × 52 in × 13 in







Locating an Echo Derrick J. Zellmann
Painting · Acrylic and Graphite on Paper · 25 in × 38 in



The Lady of North Babylon

Leah VanVaerenewyck

Fiction

From the window in her dining room, she looked down fourteen stories to watch the people hustling along Corman Road. She had not been down there for nearly nine years. She bent down to pick up the plastic watering jug from the floor, and then raised it to the spider plant sprawling over the edges of a clay pot suspended by hemp ropes looped around two of the many hooks screwed into her apartment ceiling.

“Thirsty little thing, aren’t you?” she said, as she inched the spout over the edge. She briefly focused on her bloated fingers, curved around the handle, before turning her attention back to the road below. A man with black hair curling out from beneath his knit cap caught her attention. She’d seen him walking down there before, and he reminded her of Lance. During her early twenties, she was cast opposite Lance in a production of Landford Wilson’s *A Betrothal*. As Ms. Joslyn and Mr. Wasserman for one act, they worked together on creating a perfect, award-winning iris; during that act, they were the entire world. They fancied themselves destined for greatness. But by the time she was twenty-nine, Lance had established himself as a promising stage actor, while she hadn’t been cast as any leading lady since Ms. Joslyn.

The fair complexion that had drawn Lance to her, as his black curls had drawn her to him, had grown blotchy and prone to eruption. At her dermatologist’s suggestion, she had tried multiple treatments. When nothing worked, he referred her to an endocrinologist. Right after she turned thirty (and had foolishly thought she’d faced the scariest thing in life), she learned an inoperable pituitary tumor was the source of her oily skin and swollen fingers, one of which pressed so severely against the engagement ring Lance had given her that she’d stopped wearing it. When she told him she suffered from Acromegaly, he took the ring back.

Water spilled over the edge of the tray beneath the clay pot and splattered on the wood floor. She tore her eyes away from the man below and eased the spout back from the plant. She went to the kitchen, slid the jug onto the counter, yanked the last few sheets off the paper towel roll, and hustled back into the dining room. The man with the black curls was gone.

After cleaning the puddle, she returned to the kitchen and took a pen from the counter and a magnetic notepad from the side of the fridge. She began writing out a list, knowing that she needed to make the order today. Every Monday she placed an order for next-day delivery because a pock-faced, obese man who never looked directly at her delivered on Tuesdays.

“Okay, paper towels, cauliflower, spinach, peaches, wax soap, water—eh, bottles and jug,

or just a jug?” She opened the fridge door and saw there were plenty of bottles. “Just a jug.”

After checking a few cabinets and making note of additional items, she went to the living room and sat at the computer desk before a large window that looked down on Deerfield Avenue. It made a V with Corman Road, and her building stood at the point where they met. She navigated to the organic section of the online superstore. A need to place blame coupled with Chance’s imperviousness to such a placement, resulted in her irrational suspicion of animal growth hormones and fertilizers. She disregarded the explanations for her elevated GH levels given by her doctors, held their scans, studies, and science in the same regard as myth, and remained altogether ignorant of those speculations that the Mayan ruler Zak-Kuk (considered a magnificent beauty by some) had suffered from the same condition.

“How can they be out of phosphate rock?” she muttered, shaking the mouse rapidly with her right hand. “My sprouts are ready!”

She looked to the shelf on her right where spider plant stalks and philodendron vines were immersed in small, water-filled glass vases. They needed to be potted soon.

Letting out a frustrated sigh, she muttered, “Doesn’t anyone else deliver?”

She had become obsessed with plant procreation. She started out trying to bring those award-winning irises from the script to life, but she couldn’t get them to thrive. Over the past few years, she’d determined the exact measurements and timing required to grow perfect spider plant and philodendron specimens. She used only organic fertilizers. The long, pointed, green-and-white-striped leaves of the spider plant poked out from every corner of the apartment. The philodendron plants, with their soft round leaves, hung in the bedroom. Right there in her apartment, fourteen stories above North Babylon, New York, she’d created her own Hanging Garden. And she’d done it without Lance, the not-so-great, for that matter. On good days, she felt like the queen herself, but most days she felt like a monster in the middle of a wonder. At least, though, she had her wonder.

After reviewing the items in her shopping cart, she clicked “Check Out.” Then she opened one of

the many stories she was working on, though she had but one story she told with different words: a man named George, whose mother gave him up at birth when she saw his left arm came with a useless hand sticking out where a forearm should have been; a young girl called Amy who’d been born without a proper face; a man who’d come upon an IED and left his legs bleeding on desert sand. Three weeks before, she’d received her forty-seventh rejection letter. This one was from one of her favorite magazines. It read: “Thank you for your submission. After careful consideration, our staff has decided that your piece is not suited to our publication’s audience.”

She had crumpled the letter and tossed it across the room before moving on to a piece of mail addressed in her mother’s handwriting that had grown shakier with age. Each month her parents deposited a large sum of money in her account and sent the deposit slip along with a brief note. They wrote about things like her cousin Tobias’s run for governor, his daughter Marie’s Miss New York crowning, her grandfather’s military memorial service. They always wrote of events after they happened. Though they had insisted she mustn’t withdraw when she told them she would never leave her apartment again, she believed they were afraid that she might change her mind and show up somewhere. At first it had been she who did not want them to see her, refusing their visits and rarely consenting to phone conversations. But before long they stopped trying, and then she knew they didn’t want to see her like that either.

She read through what she had drafted out about George, the man with no parents and one and a half arms. He lives below her on the tenth floor, and works a few blocks up at Hank’s Hardware. Everyone calls him their right hand man, and he doesn’t mind. His two best friends Vince and Lyle work there with him. Sometimes, after they shut down the store, the three of them go to the Lucky Strike, have a few beers, and bowl a few frames. But most times, George goes home to his wife. She is an actor who recently landed a lead role in a production that will be staged at the local repertory theatre. George appreciates watching his wife bring a character to life on stage. At the end of her performances he can’t clap, but she doesn’t mind.

She made a few changes to the story, and then changed most of them back. She had been trying to craft a moment between George and his wife, where they transcend the physical in a way she

imagined lovers could, but she couldn't get close enough to George's character. She rubbed at her eyes then pulled her eyelids up to her brow bone with the tips of her bloated fingers. The skin above her eyebrows was thick and deeply creased.

Noticing that the daylight was beginning to fade, she rose and leaned over the desk to pull the heavy, gray velvet curtains closed.

"Don't want you to catch cold," she said to the plant that hung above her desk as she ran a finger along the curve of the pot.

It was true that she needed to protect the defenseless plants from temperature extremes, but she also drew the curtains before evening to avoid seeing herself in a window backed by night. She had smashed the vanity mirror in the bathroom upon deciding she'd seen enough of her jaw line, which had grown so a-linearly that her mouth hung low on the left and no longer closed evenly; she'd seen enough of her teeth that had been stretched so far apart not one touched another at its edge. It had been a long time since the last time she looked, really looked, at herself.

She walked to the dining room to draw the curtains there too. Next, she went back through the living room, toward her bedroom, but stopped at the shelf of vases, examining each one closely. A node on one of the philodendron vines was dark around the edges. With both hands, she lifted the vase above her head and looked up through the bottom. It had begun to rot. Hands trembling, she carried the vase to the kitchen, turned on the disposal, and dumped the vine down the drain. If it were not for the disposal's roar, she feared she might have heard the plant dying.

A long minute passed before she flipped the switch down and headed to her bedroom, where she drew the curtain and began cleaning the leaves of the philodendron hanging above her bed. Cradling a large leaf in one hand, just beside her chin, and wiping it tenderly with a rag, she whispered, "It wouldn't have been a good one." The billowing plant remained silent.

Soon she crawled into bed, pulled the covers over her head, and felt the pressure of a lifetime of sadness swelling inside her chest. To let a little of it out, she wept. "Not a good one," she whispered, and cried until she slept.

Then she dreamed. She could not see herself or feel herself, but she knew she was being chased by a plant who ran on his roots and clutched a blue ribbon in pointy green-and-white-striped fingers. The man with the knit cap stood with his back to her at the end of the street. Her frenzied flight brought her no closer to him, and the plant ran faster. In the silent scream of dreams, she called *Lance*. He turned, but he was not him, and his curls had changed to worms. Tuesday morning found her inside a nightmare and returned her to her life.

She rose and washed her face wearing thick gloves so she would feel its strangeness a little less. She cleaned each tooth-apart-from-teeth. The doorbell rang, and the memory of the dream was lost. Wearing a robe and slippers and hair that hadn't been cared for in years because there was no one to see, she answered the door. In almost the same motion, she opened the door and then turned away to grab a pen because she'd need to sign. When she turned back, the pen fell from her hand.

A blonde teenaged boy looked at her from behind green eyes. He looked for only a moment, and in that moment she saw horror break through shock then fade to shame. And then, as if he realized he was not the one who need be ashamed, that shame hardened into pity. It was that moment, played out in the eyes of the few people who'd seen her face, that locked her fourteen stories above the world and made her wish for the pock-faced, obese man who never looked directly at her.

Without speaking, she led him to the kitchen where he put the bags down on the table, and set the slip down beside them. He stood waiting, with his head down and his shoulders curved in. She went to the counter for another pen, but when she found only a pencil with no tip, she turned and saw he had raised his head to look at her again. His eyes were opened wider and seemed softer than before, yet his gaze was slightly withdrawn like he was looking out at her and into his mind at the same time, wondering at the nature of him and her in the world together. He pulled a pen from his shirt pocket and, pen in hand, reached out to her.

She took it, signed it, and said, "Go."

He left without closing the door behind him. For some time she stood where he left her, staring into the hallway. When she heard a door somewhere down the hall slam closed, she shuffled to her door

and nudged it shut with her foot. Feeling flustered, she set about opening all the curtains. After she checked on the plants, she sat at the desk.

She found George in his file, where he'd just seen his wife deliver a flawless performance. Typing furiously, then deleting and lightly drumming her fingers on the keys before retyping, she felt she was eddying around the moment she'd tried to get to for so long. Letting out a frustrated sigh, she got up from the desk and went to the shelf. The empty space there haunted her.

"You're ready. They're ready," she grumbled, resenting the online superstore. Three pots sat in a row on the floor below the shelf. She went to her room and returned with a bag of potting soil. Kneeling on the wood floor and leaning back on her heels, she poured some soil into a blue paisley ceramic pot. Digging her fingers into the dark earth with her eyes closed she gripped handfuls of soil in tight fists and then relaxed them, allowing the soil to seep out between her fingers. She imagined the disposal sounding; she could not stop picturing the empty space; she felt as though she was both caving into and swelling out of herself, like her body was rocking though it was still. She thought of giving up on the plants, the stories, these mirrors that she hoped to find a different self inside.

Then, with her hands deep in the soil, thoughts deep in herself, she remembered something beautiful and kind. She jumped up and with dirty fingers began to type.

The wife steps off stage and leaves the character she was before the curtains closed. George is there, his green eyes, wide and soft.

She stopped typing and knew then that as she was she could come no closer to George. For a long while, she looked down on Deerfield Avenue and thought that the nursery a few blocks up might have phosphate rock.





Escape Cynthia Steinkrauss
Printmaking · Lithograph · 10.5 in × 9 in



Her Mouth is a Startled Sparrow

Sean Janson

Poetry

Her mouth is a startled sparrow, the edges seem to flutter
skyward, or inward, looking for the wind.

In the morning, every morning, she washes away
all the names cut in marble, tattooed in blue.

In the evening, she measures fire, finds it wanting;
but it burns burns burns, baby, you know it does.

And what if I wake up in the cold blue, in the dark?
Or in the burning marble, in the washing blue?

Shaking my fist, in some insensible rage,
at the postman, his bitter smile, his stamps.



Untitled No. 12

Eric Bailey

Photography · Infrared printed on Fiber Paper · 14 in × 8 in



Despina Cunningham

2007 John Heller Award Recipient



Enticing

Steel and Paint · 4 ft x 5 ft x 3 ft

The annual John Heller Award was established in 2003 to recognize a student whose body of work exemplifies excellence. The award received its name from one of our most beloved and distinguished faculty. Professor John Heller taught in the department of Art from 1968 to 2001. He was an inspired artist, a dedicated, gifted teacher, and an unselfish giver of his time, wisdom and expertise.



Animal Series:
Chicken

Agnieszka Wawrzak

Photography · Large Format Color · 16 in × 20 in

Metallic Past Maggie Fiedler
Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · 8 in diameter × 9 in





Woodfall Christopher Bennett
Painting · Acrylic · 28 in × 18 in

Coral Pearl Pendant

Patrick Fahy

Three-Dimensional · Red Coral, Pearl and Silver · 1 in × 3 in × .5 in



Untitled

Nicole Fontenault

Drawing · Colored Pencil · 24 in × 30 in



An Interview with Art Conservator Ms. Theresa Carmichael

Since graduating from Bridgewater State College in 1982, Ms. Theresa Carmichael has made a name for herself as a respected and trusted art conservator, performing work for institutions such as the Boston Historical Society and the Supreme Court. In 2006, BSC recognized her extraordinary accomplishments by granting her the Adrian Tinsley Award for Achievement in the Arts. As a demonstration of her gratitude for this honor, as well as to give back to her undergraduate alma mater, Ms. Carmichael offered to conserve one valuable painting from the college's galleries each year for five years. The Bridge's Laura Bowen recently sat down with Ms. Carmichael to discuss her unique experiences and insights as a successful professional and artist.



LAURA: Ms. Carmichael, how did you end up in the art program at BSC?

MS. CARMICHAEL: Well, I came undeclared, but I always loved the arts. I always thought, however, that it was more of a hobby kind of thing for me. Actually, when I decided to declare myself an art major, I thought my father was going to kill me, just because we'd always been grilled in the sciences and math at the dinner table, and so on. It was just always something that I enjoyed. For my birthday once, there's a picture of me on the porch with an easel. So, at BSC, I took a class, and I took another class.

LAURA: Other than art classes, what courses helped you prepare for your career as a conservator?

MS. CARMICHAEL: When I came here, I was taking biology for biology majors and calculus for biology majors. For me, art conservation kind of combined the arts and sciences; there's an awful lot of chemistry involved in conservation. You need to know how any material you use on a painting will react with the other substances. So for me, it was a great balance between the two. I think everybody needs to find their own balance and find what they want to do. You know, you go to work every day, doing the same thing, and you've got to make sure that it's something that you enjoy doing. I think that's crucial no matter what you decide. I mean, everybody is

good at different things. One thing that's good for somebody isn't necessarily good for everybody, but for me it was a good mix. So I studied studio art and art history as well as the sciences. I did my chemistry in the summers, cramming two years of chemistry into about six weeks. I did that twice and it was a challenge.

LAURA: What was it that led you toward art conservation?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Not a lot of people knew about conservation. I was introduced to the field working for a family on the South Shore as a teenager. I was able to observe the art conservator who worked with the family's six million dollar collection, and I was able to learn a little bit about the field. But not a lot of people knew too much about it.

LAURA: What support did you receive from your BSC professors?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: The professors here were wonderful and supportive. John Heller, for one, was very supportive because I was doing something different and I wasn't taking the safe route. Dr.

Stephen Smalley was very supportive also. I think there is a great staff here.

LAURA: I read in *The Bridgewater Review* that you studied abroad. Where have you studied?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: I went to the Universidad Internazionale de Arte in Florence, where all of my courses were in Italian. I took a six-week crash course to learn the language, but a lot of the words were technical, so even a lot of my Italian friends were unfamiliar with the terms that were used. There are a lot of scientific and technical terms used in what we do. I studied Restoration of Fine Arts in general, so we studied everything from armor, to inlaid stone, to tapestry, and painting, and it was all lecture. In addition to that, I worked for a couple of private painting conservators as an apprentice. From there, I went to the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where I specialized in painting for another three years. That was a wonderful program in which we were able to work on paintings from day one. At first we learned how to create paintings in the way that they were traditionally done, using the treatises of



Surface detail of *Seascape* before conservation



Surface detail of *Seascape* after conservation



Seascape by Roger Curtis after conservation

Cennino Cennini, back in the 1300s, to later oil paintings on canvas. We studied this first to understand the materials and how they react to different things. One of the pieces that we worked on was a seascape by David Teniers the Younger [circa 1650]. Because as oil paint ages it becomes more transparent, we were able to see that the aging of the paint film revealed changes the artist made during the execution of the painting in the form of drawing of boats in different positions. So, as students, to be able to work on that was just incredible. Really, just phenomenal pieces. The fact that the students were able to work on them—I think that's one of the great benefits of studying in Europe.

LAURA: Is it true that the Courtauld only accepts one foreign student each year?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: It certainly was true when I was there. The Courtauld is small; it only specializes in paintings. I was in a graduating class of three. I was the only American international student at that time.

LAURA: I bet that was a very difficult application process.

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well as it turned out, the day they wanted me to come interview I had my exams, and they were all oral and in Italian, so I wasn't able to make the interview date. I had an interview by myself and it was six hours long and with the board; it was a little intimidating. Everybody who I had talked to said, "Well, if you want to go into conservation, go into technical styles or something, not painting, because everybody wants to go into painting, and it's very competitive." Having come from here with not a lot of experience in conservation—it was not as though I was able to intern with anyone before I started—I didn't really think my chances were all that great. I did spend that

year in Italy before and learned everything I could and did everything I could, and lo and behold, I got the position.

LAURA: What was it that led you to painting?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well, I wanted painting from the get-go. I wasn't one hundred percent sure that I could do that, and, in fact, I spent the Christmas holiday while I was in Italy traveling around Europe, because at that point I thought I'd have to come home and work and apply to the American programs—of which there are only three—in order to go back to school. But, I ended up in London by myself for Christmas, filled out my application Christmas day, and got asked for an interview. I had met a lot of people who had tried year after year, some of whom had gotten to the interview stage; none of them, obviously, had gotten in.

LAURA: That was probably discouraging, right?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well, we knew it wasn't easy, but I guess if you want it badly enough, you can make it happen. You've got to do what you love, and if you really want it, do everything you can to make it happen.

LAURA: What was your first job as an art conservator when you returned to the United States?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: When I returned from England, I was an intern at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University. After that I worked at a private lab in New Hampshire.

LAURA: How did you start your business and how did you make yourself available to the art community as a conservator?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: I went into a partnership with a fellow graduate student from the Courtauld.

Together, we visited museums in the area and told them of our plans to start a business. MFA, Fogg, Peabody Essex Museum, Gardner etc. They put us on their referral lists and the rest is history.

LAURA: Would you mind telling us a little about the general process of art conservation?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well, there's art conservation and then there's art restoration; the difference between the two is that in conservation you're trying to preserve the artworks that you have. Restoration indicates that there has maybe been some severe loss, something that needs to be put back or replaced in order to restore it to the way it was. As you know, artwork starts deteriorating as soon as it's completed. Paint layers and varnish layers oxidize; paint cracks, and canvases go slack and taut, creating buckles within the pictures. Conservation is sort of the term that's taken over now because we try to preserve, particularly the paintings, for future generations. Now, the processes of conservation really depend on what's wrong with the picture. If it's discolored, it may have a layer of grime, soot, or nicotine that needs to be removed. If it's moldy, as often happens in this New England environment, then it needs to be treated for mold. The mold is killed, then the surface is refinished.

LAURA: Do you tend to use the original methods of the period in which the piece was produced or do you stick to modern processes and materials?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: I don't use the original methods because the philosophy of conservation today is that everything we do to the paintings is readily reversible without harming the original. What's important to know is that anything that we're going to apply to it—short of securing paint layers, because obviously we don't want that to be reversible—you're going to be able to very

easily remove without harming the original. We do hand-grind our own pigments. We use synthetic resin, because it's most likely to not change color over time, but you can take a swab with some alcohol and wipe off any of the paint that I put on it without harming the original painting.

LAURA: Are there certain types of paintings that you specialize in?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: No, I wouldn't say that there are certain paintings that I specialize in; although having trained in Europe, obviously the paintings are much older, so I've worked on pieces from the 1300s up through modern things today. I do work for a couple of modern museums, so I do some modern things, but I wouldn't say I specialize in them.

LAURA: You're back on campus for an exciting art conserving project. Can you tell us about that?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well, a couple of years ago, I received the Adrian Tinsley Award, and in response to that I told the college that I would be happy to restore a painting a year for the next five years. That's the project that we've undertaken. We've already finished a portrait of President Boyden [the third president of BSC], and I have just completed the seascape by Roger Curtis that is in the Permanent Collection Gallery. Today, we will be taking the John Enneking painting, *Spring Scene*, with us to work on. They have more projects in the works for me as well.

LAURA: Could you walk us through a basic outline of the steps that you will take when working with the John Enneking piece?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: John Enneking is an American Impressionist painter who worked in the mid to late 1800s. First I will remove the painting from the frame and then remove the surface dirt and

any discolored varnish—if it is varnished. For the next step, I will consolidate—or stabilize—the cracks. I'll do this by applying adhesive to each of the cracks and setting the paint back down to the original fabric using a heated spatula. Then I will flatten surface deformations using moisture and weight and key out [expand] the stretcher as necessary. After that, I will apply an isolating varnish layer, which separates the original paint layer from any necessary inpainting. Then I will inpaint as necessary, using dry pigments hand-ground in a stable synthetic resin. After that, I will apply a final spray coating of varnish, attach an acid-free backing board to the reverse, and surface clean the frame. Then I will fill and tone holes to match the surrounding areas.

LAURA: Most of the paintings that you are restoring from BSC, are they older?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I believe the last one was from the 1930s. That's not very old; it's more modern, but not as modern as things today. The problem with some of the modern pieces is that people don't use traditional materials anymore. You can get really experimental, not like pigments, but with binding media and additional things that are just glued onto the surface, which creates real problems for conservators. The more traditional materials that you use, the more tried and tested they are, the more they are going to withstand the test of time.

LAURA: Why do think it is important for artwork to be conserved, and how does it hold a link to our past?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: Well, it's our history for other people to enjoy. It's not quite archaeology, but it's a document, a document to the things that have happened in the past and to the people. You know, it's history. It's our visual history. So, you know, we do the little that we can to preserve

it. It's really sad when you look in storage rooms in a museum and see things that have fallen to ruin and no one can see them. You feel like no one cares because we see an awful lot of things that are so torn to shreds that you think they belong in a trashcan, but they can be brought back. Other generations can enjoy them. A lot of people don't appreciate what they have, so we try to encourage people to take care of what they do have.

LAURA: Do you have any parting advice for aspiring creative art students who are unsure of how to translate their love for the subject into a career?

Ms. CARMICHAEL: I think the fear of being a starving artist deters people from what they love. I think you need to do what you love, and if you can make a living out of it, bring back the things that are gifts to us as human beings. Being able to bring those back is just incredible. I mean, my business is in my home; I don't get away from it. I'm usually still working on the weekends, but I do really love what I do. If you can love what you do and make a living out of it, I think that's what we're here for.

Anyone interested in seeking advice about art conservation can contact Ms. Carmichael at carmichael.art@verizon.net.

Self-Portrait #1 **Leia Terry**
Drawing · Graphite · 9 in × 12 in



Stepping Out

Benjamin Hogan

Memoir Excerpt

Cluelessness was the common theme of those months. Early in my freshman year of high school, I was sitting in algebra class when my vision gave out. I went from perfect vision (well, at least it was perfect with glasses) to having completely blurry vision. I couldn't read, watch TV, or do much of anything normally. It was also giving me a sharp sense of disorientation, and I was often unsteady on my feet.

My mom and I had gone to the emergency room at Children's Hospital in Boston. The doctor had told my mother that their equipment was top-notch and that the people were great. However, when we got there, the doctors and nurses were anything but great. They were rude, refused to perform any tests, and implied that I was making the whole thing up. Ten hours after we'd arrived, we headed back home, exhausted but still clueless.

Because of all the doctors' appointments, I hadn't done a full week of school since I had gotten sick. I was falling behind in my homework because of the time missed, and falling further behind because my impaired vision was slowing my work down. I was shy by nature, and the worst part of missing so much school was that it limited my opportunities to make friends. I had mostly been eating lunch by myself at a table in the corner of the cafeteria. That wasn't a big deal to me, but missing the first dance of my high school career because I was in the emergency room was.

Three days after the visit to the emergency room, I climbed into my mom's car and, after squinting, saw a particularly grim look on her face. She didn't seem at all interested in the usual talk about school, so I put on my headphones and closed my eyes, thinking of the heavy load of homework I had that night. After the normal twenty-minute ride, we got home and my mom parked the car in front of our duplex. My father's car was there too, which was odd; he usually didn't get home from his security job until after five. We walked in to the sound and smell of steak cooking. My dad was standing and facing the stove. My mom walked over and sat at the kitchen table.

"They drug-tested you," she stated coldly.

"What? When?" I asked, exasperated at that uninvited invasion of privacy.

"At the emergency room." She clasped her hands together. "Did they ask you to pee in a cup?"

I thought about it. "Yeah, after you left for the bathroom, they came in and said they were checking for something."

"Well, that's when it was," she said. "They didn't find anything." The anger in her voice was obvious. "Are you making all this up, Ben?" she asked. I could feel her blue eyes scanning mine for something. My dad sat down next to her.

"No!" I exclaimed. She didn't respond, so I looked toward my father, who was also silent. The only sound came from the steak that was sizzling and popping on the stove next to me.

"Are you fucking serious?" I asked, looking back and forth between them. Their eyes widened. Swearing wasn't something I did very often, and barely ever in front of my parents. At that moment, I didn't care. "Why would I make this up?"

My temper was rising. I glared at my parents, both of whom were sitting in chairs beside the kitchen table. I balled my fists.

"Well," my mother started, then paused for a moment. Her blue eyes looked quizzical as she continued. "It's not that we don't believe you, but the doctors can't find anything. Wouldn't you be a bit suspicious?"

"Not if I knew I wasn't trying to bullshit everyone," I responded.

"Watch your mouth," my father warned. He wasn't stern very often, and I knew that when he was, it was usually best to back off. They'd set me off though.

I turned away. Someone yelled for me to wait, but I didn't listen. I flung open the door and ran down the stairs and out to the street.

The anger that I felt was already subsiding as I ran down the stairs and out the door. What the hell am I doing? I wondered. I knew that I was going to be in trouble for flipping out at my parents though, so I decided that I might as well make the trouble worth it. My legs powered me up the sidewalk and around the corner toward the center of town.

I didn't really have a particular goal; I just wanted to clear my head before I went back, and the center of town seemed the most logical place to go. There were places I could go and hang out until I figured things out. I wasn't angry, but I was confused. I quickly decided that I wanted to go back on my own terms and not get chased down or anything like that. The road leading to the center was a busy street on a big

hill, and as I looked down at my khaki pants, bright orange shirt, and matching orange and green tie, I realized that if my parents were following me, it would be almost impossible for them to miss me. What else am I going to do, though? I wondered. It wasn't like I had any money or a change of clothes on me.

I knew that with every step away from home I was making the situation worse for myself later; running away was the coward's way out. I didn't care about that, though, as I reached the town center. I just continued to walk.

When I came to a church, I stopped. It was certainly one of the nicer churches in the area, large and brown with all of the fancy steeples and archways that were supposed to inspire awe and faith, but I wasn't overly impressed. Despite having been in Catholic school since the middle of third grade, I was never really religious.

When I was in third grade, my mother found out that a book we were reading at Red Sneakers, a nonreligious school, had swearing and sex in it. She quickly gathered a group of mothers, and the school lost about twenty students because of it. My parents had me transferred into St. John's Elementary the next week, and so my time in Catholic school began. Even in third grade, I didn't understand the pomp and pageantry of the church.

Despite my cynicism toward religion, I believed in God and so felt compelled to enter the church. So far, medical science hadn't been the answer to my problems, and I thought that maybe spiritual guidance was the way to go. I brushed my longish brown hair away from my glasses and climbed under a wooden eave and up the concrete steps. The doors looked as if they could have been on a castle: thick-looking wood with a large, brass ring exactly in the middle. I pulled on the ring and let it fall back against the wood with a satisfying thunk, but nothing else happened, so I knocked. I could hear the sound echoing around the church, but no one came to answer the door. Guess there's no one here, I decided, turning back down the stairs.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone getting off of a public bus down the street. I couldn't really tell who it was because of the blurry vision, but her coat was the exact same sky blue as my mother's. Fearing for the worst and not wanting to cause a

public scene, I turned and ran down an alleyway between the church and the rectory next door. Partially because I still wanted to talk to someone, and partially because I didn't want the person, who may or may not have been my mother, to see me, I went to the side door of the rectory and knocked.

A heavysset woman opened the door. She wasn't wearing the archetypal habit, but I had spent enough time around nuns to know that this woman was one. She had on a white, long-sleeved shirt and a long, blue skirt. Something shiny hung around her neck. I assumed it was a crucifix. But it was more than that. Her posture was immaculate. In my experience, only nuns could stand this perfectly straight.

"Hi, Sister," I said. "I was wondering if there was a priest around that I could talk to?"

"Confessionals are on Thursdays, young man," she said as she looked me up and down.

"Oh, no, no," I stammered. "I'm not looking to do confession; I just wanted to talk to a priest."

"Sorry, nobody has office hours today," she responded before stepping back and closing the door.

I stood there for a minute, shocked that I had been turned away from the church...by a nun. I thought about putting a rock through one of the rectory's windows, but as the thought entered my mind, a cold wind cut through the alleyway and over my bare forearms. I rubbed them to get them warm, and I reconsidered, turning back toward the street.

What the hell kind of church turns away someone in need? I moped to the end of the alleyway and thought about my grandparents. Their home was filled with pictures and statues of Jesus, and they went to church at least five times a week. At that moment, I couldn't understand why their faith was so strong. Maybe the priest was in his office when they visited.

I reached the corner of the alley and peeked my head out to try to see if anyone was around. I was convinced the coast was clear. What a bunch of assholes, I thought as I walked away. It would have killed my grandparents to know what I was thinking, but I gave up the church after that.

I still wasn't ready to go home. This half hour had

been the longest I was away from adult supervision since I'd fallen ill, and I liked the freedom. After about a mile, the sidewalk ended and the road turned into a highway. There was a subway station (but I had no money, so that was out), a full-fledged mall, and a strip mall down the road. I was feeling dehydrated and really had to pee, but I decided to press on.

After risking my life to cross a four-lane highway and tearing a hole in the knee of my pants in the process, I sat on the sidewalk and again wondered what the hell I was doing.

The mall was still a long way off, and I really was in dire need of a bathroom. I stopped at the strip mall. I decided that I could hang around the toy store there by myself without being noticed, so I walked quickly through its sliding doors. The heat in the entryway was on, and I stopped for a second before going in, letting the heat drift around me until I felt better. Once inside, I ran back to the men's room to relieve myself and sip liberally from the water fountain.

Feeling relieved and quenched, I became aware that my feet were killing me. I couldn't just sit in the middle of a toy store to relax though, so I went to look at the action figures, standing in the same spot for as long as possible to rest my feet. Eventually, I had looked at everything I wanted to see, and the same employee kept walking by me every few minutes. I felt a sense of paranoia, a vague fear that, somehow, my parents had contacted the local TV station and that this guy knew I was on the loose. So, I left.

Exiting into the cold night, I peered at my watch until it came into focus; it had been almost four hours since I had left my house. I sat on the sidewalk and thought about what I was doing. I eventually decided it was pointless because I had no clue what I was trying to prove anyway. Maybe I just needed a break from everything. I did know that staying out indefinitely wasn't possible: I had no money, no transportation, and nowhere else I could realistically go.

I walked across the parking lot and went into the lobby of Happy's, a family restaurant where I knew there was a pay phone. As I entered, I felt like everyone looked in my direction, but I was probably mistaken. I felt self-conscious about my orange shirt and the dirty, disheveled-looking teenager that was underneath it.

I didn't have a quarter for the phone, so I dialed the number for a collect call company, which I had learned through their television commercials that played at least a hundred times a day. As I dialed, their infectious jingle played over and over in my mind. Thankfully, this was interrupted when an automated female voice came on the line: "Please state your name at the beep."

The line beeped and I panicked, dropping the receiver onto the edge of the phone's metal shelf, where it landed with a loud clack. I quickly picked it back up and hung it up in its cradle. Taking special care not to turn and look at the restaurant patrons, who I assumed were still looking at me, but now in some mix of pity and confusion, I picked the phone up again and dialed the collect number. This time when the automated voice came on, I stated simply "Me." I was concerned that my voice sounded cracked and broken. After a pause, the automated voice thanked me for choosing the service, and the phone started to ring. I could feel the nervous sweat from my palms sticking to the phone.

"Hello? Ben?" came a concerned female voice from the other end of the line. It didn't sound like my mom.

"Um...yeah," I responded.

"Honey, it's Aunt Dorene. Where are you? Are you okay?" She sounded frantic, and as a result, her words were jumbling into each other. It took a second for me to process what she was asking.

"I'm fine, I guess. Where are my parents?"

"They're out looking for you and they asked me to watch over your brother." I thought about it. That made sense as she lived next door. "Tell me where you are," she continued. "I'll take your brother and come get you."

For a brief moment, I thought about hanging up the phone and really making everyone worry. A large part of me wanted to make everyone suffer for thinking I was faking to get myself out of school. But then I thought about my parents driving around looking for me and I gave in without another thought.

"I'm at Happy's on the parkway," I answered. "I'll be outside."

She started to respond, but I hung up. It wasn't my aunt's reassurance I wanted, it was my parents'. I

pushed open the restaurant's glass door and went outside to sit on a bench and wait. I started to people-watch, one of my favorite time wasters. On this particular night, there were a lot of happy-looking families about. Sitting outside of that restaurant, as I waited for my ride, shivering, I desperately wanted things to be normal again. My head was fucked up, and so was my freshman year of high school. The worst part of all of it, though, was that even my family had lost faith in me. I tried my best to fight it, but I was broken down. Lacking better options, I put my head into my hands, trying to fight back tears. The cold wasn't bothering me anymore.

After a few minutes, my aunt came to pick me up in her red sedan. I didn't notice her until she rolled down the passenger's side window and called out, "Ben?"

I looked up confusedly, having lost all sense of time. I stood up and climbed into the front seat of the car. My younger brother was sitting in the back, so I waved and wanly smiled at him.

My aunt started to drive and, since no one was talking, I turned the radio on. For some reason, I couldn't stay awake, so I leaned my head up against the cool glass of the window and napped until we got back to my house. It was only a few miles though, so when my brother nudged me as my aunt parked the car, I was still exhausted.

I started to get scared as I trudged over the sidewalk and up the stairs that would lead me to our side of the house. My parents weren't home yet. There was no way to get a hold of them, but they probably would be back soon. Someone had left a plate of cube steak and green beans in the microwave, and I was so hungry that I didn't really care whether or not it was mine. I ate slowly, savoring the taste so that I wouldn't have to think about the inevitable consequences that were barreling toward me.

Just after I finished eating, as I brought my plate to the sink, I heard the door open and saw my parents walk in. I couldn't bring myself to look at their faces, so I looked down to the floor. My mother was indeed wearing her blue coat, and, for a moment, I wondered just how close I had come to being caught a few hours earlier. Before long though, my father grabbed me by the shoulder and spoke.

"Well?"

I glanced up. I expected to see a look of fury, but all I saw was concern in his eyes. "Well what?"

"Do you have something to say?" he asked expectantly. I guess he's looking for an apology, I thought.

"I'm sorry I left," I said. "I wasn't thinking straight at first. But I hate being accused of lying by you guys. I can take it from my teachers or my doctors; they can't figure this out. But you..." I had to pause. I felt tears welling in my eyes, so I swallowed hard and waited for them to subside before I continued. "I just can't deal with that. I can't. Sorry."

They both looked stricken, and I'm sure I did too. It occurred to me, for maybe the first time, how hard this whole ordeal had been on my parents. My mom walked over and wrapped her arms around me. "We do believe you. We're just frustrated and we're sure you are too," she stated. "You're allowed to be aggravated...I'd be more worried if you weren't. But you have to try to be patient."

"Yeah, pal," my dad added. "We're all scared, but we've got to try to stay calm and be honest with each other, okay?"

I started to cry, and this time, I didn't bother trying to get rid of the tears. I could feel their warmth against my mom's sleeve. "Yeah," I croaked. "I just want things to be regular again."

"I know," my father responded, "we do too and we'll do everything we have to so that can happen."

"Thanks," I said. My dad joined us and the three of us shared a hug. It wasn't in my nature to be affectionate like that, but that moment, with the three of us standing in my kitchen, was very comforting.





Eternal | Michael Boudreau
Drawing · Graphite · 8.5 in × 8.5 in

A Life of Fiction

Cynthia Heslam

Fiction

This year had been fairly serene. Practically no nasty students in her five classes. Chatty, yes. Nasty, no. She could take chatty; that was exuberance, youth. Nasty was abusive, but no one had told her to fuck off this year; no one had suggested she was unlucky in love. This week, lessons were relatively straightforward—agonizingly compulsive as most mandates dictated by the higher echelons of academia were—but simple enough to teach.

They would review for the MCAS English Language test. There was no telling what would be on it—anything from parts of speech to Shakespearean sonnets. The Massachusetts Department of Education could throw in whatever it wanted to, and it was Caroline's job to see that her tenth graders were ready.

"Okay, guys, let's read the sentence on the board: 'Macbeth is driven by ambition to commit murder time and time again.' Who can tell me what part of speech 'commit' is?"

Caroline was surprised: three students in this lower-level, academically-challenged class raised their hands. She called on Craig.

"It's a stage direction," he said with conviction.

Caroline stared at him; his hair was gelled into five spikes as solid as the Statue of Liberty's. At least he paid attention most of the time, and he had really been into *Macbeth*, especially the part where Lady Macbeth says she'd rather pull a suckling baby off her nipple and smash its brains in than renege on a promise to kill the king.

"Not quite," Caroline spoke carefully. "Although it's true that stage directions are part of the structure of plays, this sentence is not a stage direction. Among other things, stage directions help actors decide how to say their lines. Remember that." Caroline never let a teachable moment pass by. "Amanda, you had your hand up. What's the part of speech?" Amanda was sweet, smart, and always did her homework, despite being four months pregnant.

"Universal Truth."

"Well, Amanda, it certainly could be considered a universal truth that ambition, when it gets out of hand, can lead us to commit . . . terrible acts against other people, but what we're looking for here is a part of speech." *A fucking part of speech, Amanda.* Caroline's silent inner voice was struggling up from its seedier depths.

Brendan's entire arm was waving at her from the back row. He was one of her best students. True, this was his third attempt at trying to pass tenth grade English, but he had doubled up on English classes and was scheduled to graduate this year—if he passed the MCAS. He was technically under house arrest, but was allowed to attend school with a security bracelet wrapped tightly around his ankle. He was a nice kid, though somewhat misguided, but not nasty, at least not to Caroline. Once in a while he would write, "Throw rocks at cops" on the board before class started, but always erased it, when asked, without giving Caroline a hard time. "Okay, Brendan, enlighten us. 'Commit' is what part of speech?"

"It's got to be a foreshadowing."

"Well, we're getting closer. That sentence tells us something that may be foreshadowed in *Macbeth*." She paused. Twenty tenth graders waited for Caroline to set them straight, the brighter ones sensing something weighty about the power of the answer. She assumed they all wanted to pass the MCAS the first time. "Okay, guys. I think it's time to do a little bit of reviewing. Why don't we open up our grammar workbooks to page one? Let's start with verbs, the action words of all good sentences."

Caroline could hear Beth quietly getting herself wound up. At least she was in class and semi-awake today with no drool marks on her opened notebook. Leave it to Beth to pare everything down to its simplest form. Caroline could hear the whispered, "This is bullshit," but she ignored it. It was better to pick your battles with students like Beth. She was an attendance failure for the third term this year; she had cut most of Caroline's classes, never making up any of the work, even though Caroline kept a folder of accumulating assignments with Beth's name on it. Beth was also a repeat offender, a junior trying to pass English 10 again, scheduled to graduate at the end of next year.

Caroline had ignored the whisper, but found it more difficult every day to ignore its message. When she thought about it, really thought about it, she knew its truth: it *was* all bullshit. When would they ever need to know that "commit" was a verb? What they needed to know was that committing your life to some sort of dream could help you get through all the bullshit.

"Okay," she heard herself say. "Let's see if we can figure out together what part of speech 'commit' really is. Don't worry. We'll get a handle on parts of speech. We've still got time. The test is eight days away."

•

The first weeks in April brought some gorgeous days and Caroline knew that Beth must have been called by real life: the smell of azaleas and forsythia and more daylight and spring breezes—bound to be followed by a true New England summer. A taste. A tease of things to come. Beth only showed up to class when it was cloudy or rainy.

This day was drizzly and raw and they were doing the rough draft part of the research paper—the part that included parenthetical citations—a headache to learn and a headache to teach. Caroline had moved them into the writing lab and was quietly listening to the click-click of keyboards, looking over the shoulders of her students. "Craig, you can research the price of cars later. And take those headphones off. Get cracking on that rough draft."

"Cracking, Ms. Bellevue? That's an odd phrase, don't you think?" This was followed by noisy laughter.

Just once, she'd like to shoot something back. *Let's talk about odd, Craig*. In the interest of keeping her job, she kept her mouth shut.

Beth was looking at a fashion magazine online. This was the first time she'd been in school for a couple of weeks, having missed everything in the research writing process from visiting the media center to taking notes on index cards to drafting an outline. But she had been there when they were brainstorming topics. Caroline had told her it was certainly okay to write a research paper on why marijuana should be legalized as long as she researched data on both sides of the argument, getting information from experts, not friends. Beth had seemed thrilled at the prospect of that research, but now she seemed to have lost momentum.

"Beth, where are you in the process?" Caroline sat down next to Beth at an empty computer.

"This is all bullshit, Ms. Bellevue. I can't fucking do this." She said this in a low voice without looking at Caroline. Beth never looked her in the eye.

"Yes you can."

"I already know about this anyway. My dad grows pots of marijuana in the back garden. He sells it." Beth was getting revved up again, but this time Caroline sensed more of a serious anger welling up from some dark spot.

Caroline could hear stifled laughter throughout the computer lab. "That's another good reason to research the topic. Try to find out why it has never been legalized in the first place. You have the Internet right in front of you with a whole world of information in it."

Beth's trembling voice was loud now. "No, I don't. We don't have a computer at home, you fucking moron." The laughter stopped. Everyone grew quiet, waiting for Caroline to call security, to send Beth to the office for swearing and undermining Caroline's authority, but she decided to ride this one out.

She spoke softly. "But you have one here, and I can help you if you'd just come to school. You're just overwhelmed. Try to take this research project, and life for that matter, one step . . ."

Beth stood up. "Didn't you hear me? I said I don't have a computer at home, and I can't stand coming to school doing these stupid projects that you pull out of your ass. When am I ever going to need to write a research paper?"

Caroline stood up and pointed a finger in the direction of the door. "Get out of my class, Beth. Now." Her own nasty voice boomed below, silent but real, somewhere in the pit of her stomach. *Get the fuck out of here you little bitch. Go home to your dump and your crappy life and ignore any messages from me. What do I know? I'm just a goddamn English teacher pulling assignments out of my ass.*

"It's teachers like you that make kids like me want to kill you," Beth screamed, slamming the door behind her.

•

It was May and trees were busting out in blossoms, drinking in a cold drizzle. Birds were singing despite the rain. *Lord of the Flies* was the novel. Since only about two percent of the kids in English 10 ever did their homework, Caroline did all the reading aloud in class. Sometimes they read, sometimes Caroline read. Sometimes William Golding himself read on tape. Caroline had tried putting

them in a circle—that was the cool, college thing to do—but the kids could see too much of each other, whispering, giggling, passing notes around the circle, so Caroline sat on the desk in front of five rows, four kids to a row, and read. She had just read the scene where Roger, the sadistic one, hurls a rock at Piggy the outcast, sending Piggy to his death, his brains dashed out on the pink rocks below.

"Cool," Craig said.

"So how do you feel about Piggy's death besides it being so cool?" Caroline asked.

"That dude deserved it." This was from Brendan.

"Deserved to die, Brendan? Why?"

"Because he never fought back, and he was such a loser. He was probably gay."

There was a burst of agreement, coming mostly from the boys, and then silence. Amanda had her hand raised.

"Amanda, what do you think? Do you think Piggy was a loser?"

"Can I go to the nurse, please?" Amanda held up a bloody finger. "I just had my belly button pierced yesterday and it's bleeding."

"If you have your passbook." Caroline retrieved a pen from her desk drawer and signed Amanda's passbook, trying not to look at her exposed navel, her burgeoning belly.

"Okay class, get your journals out. Let's do some writing. Don't worry about grammar or spelling," Caroline said. "Just change the point of view, from yours to whichever character in *Lord of the Flies* you feel like being. Write a couple of entries. If you decide to be Piggy, make sure you speak like Piggy and stay true to his character. If you want to be Jack, write about what the thrill of the hunt feels like."

"Who thinks up these stupid assignments?" The rain had brought Beth into the classroom for the first time in a couple of weeks.

"I do," Caroline said, trying desperately to understand, trying desperately to rise above the hatred she felt toward Beth.

“When am I ever going to be called upon to see that loser’s point of view?”

It was too hard to be perfect. Caroline looked at Beth’s lowered head. “You’re not, Beth. Never. So write from Jack’s point of view. How evil is Jack, do you think?” *That’s right up your alley, isn’t it, Miss Know-It-All?*

Beth looked up at her. Caroline was always amazed at the intensity of Beth’s purple-eyed gaze in the rare times she looked at her. “Then why are we doing this?”

Caroline took a deep breath. “Because, Beth, in the real world, you will be called upon to see life from many different points of view. And you will at some time in your life have to decide what you want to believe in. You can have any attitude you want, be anything you decide to be: seeker of peace, seeker of evil—it’s your choice. And writing is one way to find out what you believe in. If you’re really still and listen, the pen will uncover worlds within worlds inside of you. But you have to listen sometimes, even to those people who you don’t think have anything to say. Even to the people you think are pieces of shit.”

“You got that right. I think you’re a piece of shit. I don’t think you believe in any of the crap you dish out.” Beth stood up, picked up her journal, and flung it into the waste basket. “Don’t worry; you don’t have to call the office. I’ll just leave on my own this time.”

Caroline kept her voice steady and said, “Consider this, Beth. Why don’t you come back and write sometime? Unless, of course, you’re too afraid to see what rises to the surface.” She held her breath and watched Beth walk out of the silent room, slamming the door behind her.

That night, for the first time in years, Caroline wrote in her journal, got out her frustration, lambasting the system—five easy pages of anger about the world’s obsession with bullshit. The pen inked out this final bitter thought before Caroline collapsed into a deep sleep, dreaming of not teaching, of not needing and not wanting anyone’s approval anymore for anything.



small talk

Stacy Nistendirk

Poetry

He rose from the dead after 27 years, so I invited him to lunch.
He looked good, husky and tan, same straight, square teeth.
I knew his smile right away, as he told me of the places he had been,
the golf in Alaska, the poker in California, in Vegas.

I told him of the places I had been,
the park at night looking for his high school sweetheart,
the doctor's for Hepatitis shots,
behind the hammer of a loaded gun. All smiles stopped.

The salads came—I picked out the olives and tossed them into the bread basket.
Don't like olives?

He slouched as he told me of how he tried many times to make contact,
Christmas, birthdays, or just to check in to see if I was safe.

And lots of other things.

I stiffened as I told him that I wouldn't have taken his calls;
I was busy, avoiding dirt and blood and murder.

He shifted in his seat at each ugly instance,
of peeing in cups and hiding knives in my room,
afraid of the breathing on the other side of the door.

I'm sorry about your mother.

He began to sweat; he said it was the cancer.

I knew it was fear of how long this would go on. So I continued.

Yeah, sorry about your cancer.

You've been through a lot; I'm glad I came.

Even a guilty man gets his last supper.

I rose and left him with the check.



Fleeting Lauren Rheaume
Mixed Media · Collage · 10 in × 13 in

Professor Groovy

Joan Medeiros Livingston

Fiction

The sixties came just in time for Professor Edward Burke, who was meandering through middle age while everyone around him was fresh and young. He started calling himself “Ned” and insisted that the students taking his philosophy classes at the state college do the same. He let his fair hair grow to his jaw, tried a beard, but gave it up, I assumed, when it came in gray. He shed his suit and tie for turtlenecks and a fake leopard skin vest, although sometimes he wore a garish top woven in some Third-World nation.

Ned Burke was an impressive figure. I often saw him strolling across the quadrangle, two or three students in tow, his hands scanning the air as he made a point, or I’d see him holding court at the coffeehouse in the basement of the Unitarian Church near the campus. He usually sat with his wife at one of the tables to the side of the makeshift stage. Mrs. Burke, whose first name was Inez, wore pointed eyeglasses and a pageboy like her husband, but I always thought it was too girlish a hairstyle for her. Except for the liberal minister, who was the pastor of the church, and a new professor in the art department, they were the oldest people in the audience.

Friday was open-poetry night at the coffeehouse, and I remember one time when I sat at a table next to the Burkes with my friend, Geneva. Ned was the headliner among a few student poets. When the editor of the literary magazine announced his name, Ned leaped to the stage as if he were claiming a prize. He was dressed in black, and when he sat at the microphone his thighs hung open in a wide, manly pose. His shirt was unbuttoned halfway. Geneva sighed.

“Oh, the flavor of jasmine/ I can taste it on her lips/ my lover/ the flower of my middle age,” he began one of his poems.

Ned recited four pieces, including a clever one about trying to hide a fart in class. At the end, everyone except Inez stood, but she clapped along with the rest of us. Her silver bracelet, heavy with charms, sparkled from the candlelight, so it looked as if it were in orbit around her wrist. Ned flashed the crowd two fingers spread in a V.

“You’re a big hit, Ed,” Inez said in a flat voice as Ned waved to the students in the back of the room.

One of my friends read a bitter, rambling thing called “Pussy Willow.” I knew the subject of the poem—she was a classmate of mine—and frankly, the boy-poet never had a chance of getting or keeping her. But when he was done, Ned stood and clasped the back of his arm and hand in what appeared to be a special poet’s shake. Ned congratulated him on its imagery as the wannabe poet smiled shyly and pushed his

square, black glasses up his nose. Geneva, who was not the girl in the poem, jumped up to peck him on the cheek.

I joked, "Farmhouse kid. Out of state."

Ned gave me a sly smile.

The next day, I went to the homecoming game, the athletic highpoint of the fall, when the college's football team got creamed by another state college. Our players were typically a sad bunch, because it was too small a school to attract top-rate athletes, but it didn't matter because nobody was that interested in sports. The kids in the bleachers were so high they booed the homecoming queen when she rode onto the field in an open convertible during halftime. The frat brothers who swaggered beside the car flipped us off.

"Off with her head!" Geneva yelled, which made all the hippies around her laugh. "Off with all of them!"

Ned sat in the lower end of the bleachers with a couple of colleagues and Inez, who was wearing a long fur coat. He was the chair of the college's philosophy department, which had three professors including him. The other two professors were ordinary men, although when the trustees tried to cut one from the faculty, the students staged such large-scale demonstrations that classes stopped for a week. That would not happen to Ned, who had long achieved tenure. He was also in good standing with the administration because he had written two slim books in his field and hosted the faculty's annual New Year's Eve party at his house. Students who were hired to serve at the Burkes' party reported that everyone got stinking drunk, and there were numerous incidents of sloppy flirting.

I was standing high in the stands next to Geneva. Ned kept checking our group, who openly passed a jug of wine and hooted loudly when a player from the other team intercepted the ball. One guy used his fingers to make a sharp whistle, and when he got Ned's attention, Geneva raised the jug and waved him over. Ned flashed us a peace sign.

"Well, well, if it isn't Professor Groovy," I said.

Geneva adjusted the slant of her floppy leather hat. "You're just terrible, Lenora. Ned's a great guy."

"He's old enough to be our father."

"I like to think of him as mature."

I grabbed the jug from her hand. "Same difference."

The next weekend, Geneva and I went to a grad student's apartment. Ned was the center of the crowd's attention while his wife, wearing a plaid skirt to her ankles, watched from the kitchen. Inez held her glass of red wine at such a careless tilt it appeared ready to spill. Ned asked everyone to sit in a circle on the floor, because he was going to hold a T-group session, a sure-fire way, he explained, to let people expose their feelings and get rid of their inhibitions. They were supposed to accomplish that by doing embarrassing things, it seemed, such as touching a person on the part of the body they wanted to touch the most.

When it was my turn, and I had to do it with a boy in the group, I stroked his long, blond hair, which looked freshly washed. Some of the group members groaned, because I did not grope his crotch, but that definitely was not what I wanted to touch. When he reached for the strands of small, glass beads around my neck, his fingers tickled me so I slapped his hand away. Ned laughed loudly, and I was glad I had not been paired with him, because Geneva had, and he fondled her breasts as if he were testing their ripeness. Geneva was not wearing a bra so her nipples got hard beneath her blouse. She tried to act cool, but her cheeks reddened brightly as most of the group went "Ah!" Her hand shook when she patted Ned's thigh.

Inez, who was standing in the kitchen doorway, shouted, "Jesus, Ed, you're scaring that poor girl to death."

"*Holy shit*," I hissed.

Later, in the car, Geneva marveled at how well she had handled that scene. I kept thinking of Inez Burke's edgy voice and the way Ned's head jiggled, making it appear as if he were stifling a laugh when he released Geneva's breasts. Everyone else tittered as if they were in on a joke.

Geneva and I had become friends when we moved onto the same floor at Faulkner Dorm, known on campus as Fuckner Dorm. Sometimes we opened our windows and sat on the sills, resting our feet on the fire escape, while Geneva smoked

and complained she had been an unbeautiful girl shunned by those who counted in high school.

"You weren't popular? Neither was I."

Her cigarette butt tumbled sparking to the ground.

"Yeah, right," she said.

After dinner Geneva and I often went to the commuter lounge, an open room in the basement of the administration building. We read our textbooks and took notes as we sat among chatting night-school students. She liked talking about Ned, what he did in class, the witty things he said about the cool life. He liked jazz and met Henry Miller when he lived in Paris. He dropped acid, claiming it brought him nearer to God than church. A few afternoons a week, he held office hours and his students stayed for deep discussions. Mondays, he led a T-group. Geneva told me they often did roleplaying. Last week, Ned had them pretend they were four years old.

"It was so liberating," she said.

I rolled my eyes and made gagging noises.

Geneva frowned. "Ned says you should come sometime."

"I'm not one of his students."

"He says it would make you less uptight."

I narrowed my eyes. "You two talk about me?"

Geneva shrugged. "Your name came up."

She snorted when I asked if Mrs. Burke was there. She said Ned only stayed married because his wife was filthy rich.

"Who told you that?"

Geneva gave me a smug smile. "I just know."

One night, Ned came into the lounge. He nodded at us as he fed change into the coffee machine, then came over with his cup.

"Hello, Geneva. Hello, Lenora Dias," he said in a baritone that made my last name sound much sexier than my ancestors surely intended. "Mind if I join you?"

Ned shook his head dramatically, upset, he said, by the news from Vietnam. Too many deaths and no talk of peace. He clutched his fake leopard skin vest. A lottery for the draft would be held in December, which meant some of his students might be shipped overseas if they passed the physical.

"I'm glad I'm not a boy these days," he said, pained. "The war. I would rather go to jail."

Geneva went to the vending machine to get coffee. Ned bent closer. His breath smelled like sweetened coffee.

"Tell me, am I making you uncomfortable?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I just sense it. I've got a knack for it." Ned paused. "So, Lenora, is there something you'd like to tell me?"

Geneva was back with her coffee.

"Tell you what?" she asked.

"Never mind."

That Saturday, Geneva and I were going to a Halloween party at the lakeside house a couple of grad students rented for the winter. Costumes were optional, but we went to the Salvation Army, where we scored prom gowns, turquoise and tangerine, strapless satin and taffeta numbers from the fifties that rustled suggestively. We got silly as we tried on the dresses over our clothing and posed in the full-length mirror. Geneva twisted around so she could see the back.

"I never went to my high school prom," she said, looking into the mirror. "Did you?"

"Yeah, I did."

Her face fell.

"I wanted to go. I even had a gown."

Her voice was sad and wistful. I wanted to tell her it wasn't that much fun, but she wouldn't have believed me.

"Tell you what, Geneva. I'll let you be prom queen."

The hem of her gown swirled as she twirled in front of the mirror.

At the Halloween party, the only refreshments were booze, pot, and bags of potato chips, so everyone got smashed really fast. The stereo played danceable stuff that jammed the living room with wiggling costumed people. I grabbed bunches of my gown's skirt so it would not get stepped on. People were shouting, "Prom Queen!" But I told them that the honor belonged to Geneva. "Just call me first runner-up," I said.

Ned and Inez Burke arrived a few hours later. Ned, carrying two bottles of wine, came as Julius Caesar. Inez had glued felt cat ears to a plastic headband. I had not expected to see the Burkes, but it appeared Geneva had, because she hurried to Ned, squealing, "It's about time." He gave her one of those T-group greetings, a hug and a light kiss-kiss on the lips.

Ned grinned.

"Well, well, if it isn't Lenora, the last of the vestal virgins."

I glared at Geneva, who was turned the other way. Inez glanced at us then shouted for a corkscrew.

The party was loud, but we got away with it because most of the lakeside cottages were closed for the winter. People kept leaving for the back porch overlooking the water, then reappearing after they shared a joint. It was too chilly to be outside too long, but everyone, including me in my turquoise strapless gown, was flushed from dancing.

I ducked into a bedroom to get a joint from my coat, stuck beneath a large pile of clothes. The door shut, and when I turned, Ned was stumbling forward. He hummed when he saw the joint in my hand, and then plucked a book of matches from the dresser top behind me.

"Great idea," he crooned.

Ned took the joint from my hand and lit it. He held the smoke and then placed the unlit end between my lips. We went back and forth, separated by inches, until the joint was spent and the air around us smoky. Ned's crown of fake laurel leaves hung crookedly on his head, and his mouth moved in a fat-lipped smile as if he tasted something good. He laughed when I laughed.

"Ms. Dias, at last, we meet."

The music, something Motown, was cranked louder in the living room. People were shouting and laughing. Feet pounded the floor. Somewhere Inez Burke was taking it all in. Perhaps she was wondering what had become of her husband.

"We should get back to the party," I said, tipping my head toward the noise.

"Why the rush?"

His finger traced the bony ridge of one of my shoulders, then dipped toward the top of the gown. He chuckled when I swiped it away. "Professor Burke."

"Ned. Call me Ned."

"Professor Burke, this isn't a good idea."

"Wait a minute."

I watched as he tossed clothing from the bed to the floor, and then he sat, patting the spot next to him on the sagging mattress. I stayed put. The sheet of his toga had come undone, exposing his white Jockeys and undershirt. His laurel wreath was on the floor. Ned stretched out his hand, but I shook my head. "Sorry," I whispered.

I met Geneva at the door. She eyed the disheveled Ned on the bed.

"What the hell's going on?"

"Believe me, absolutely nothing."

"Yeah, sure."

She shoved my arm as she moved toward Ned. I left the door open then squeezed into the crowd to join the other dancers moving wildly to the music. We jerked and jumped to the record, and when that one ended we stayed in our spots waiting for the next. Across the room, Ned was Julius Caesar again and hailing his fans. Geneva shot me menacing looks. I waved her off then dropped onto the sofa when I saw an empty spot. Inez Burke was sitting in an easy chair beside it. The flame from her lighter flickered in her glasses as she fired up a cigarette. She blew the smoke in a long, noisy stream. She eyed me.

"Lenora, right? Ed told me he liked a short story you wrote for the college magazine. Why didn't

you read something of yours at the coffeehouse?”

I told her I didn’t like to be on stage, and Inez murmured as she eyed her husband dancing with Geneva. His arms pumped to the music’s beat. The skirt of his toga bounced.

“Don’t worry,” she said dryly. “I made him wear underwear.”

I nodded and then asked Inez if she wrote, but she said No. Music was her thing. She played the piano, mostly classical, but some jazz, too. She tapped ashes into a cup. “None of *this* stuff.” She went on to say she liked being married to a man who wrote poetry. He worked at it for hours, and when he was ready, he called her into his study so he could read aloud what he had written. Sometimes he repeated the poem several times so she could get a feel for it. That first one he read at the coffeehouse had been a birthday present to her.

“Jasmine”? He wrote that for you?”

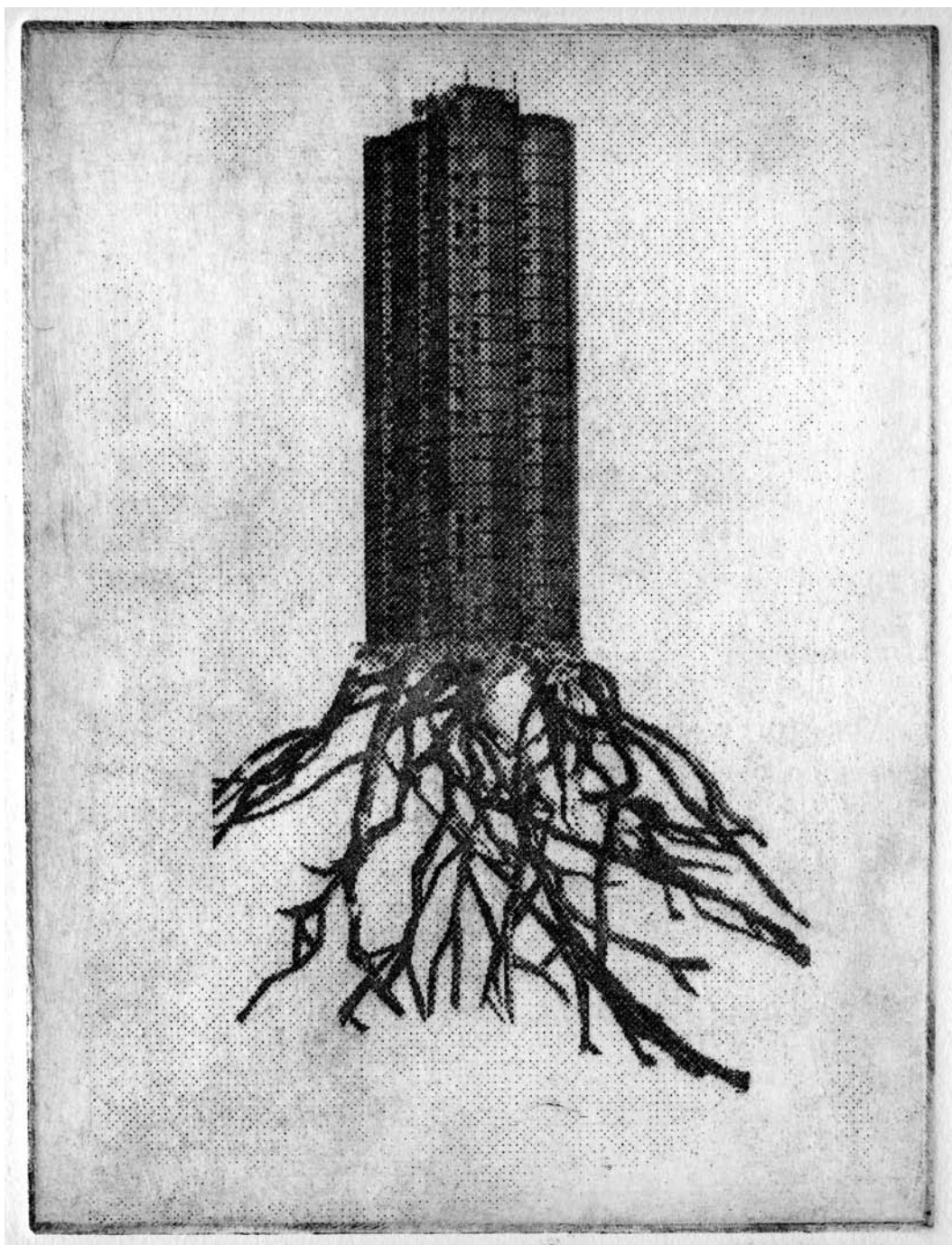
Inez took a long drag from her cigarette. Her tight lips curled as she forced out the smoke.

“The flower of his middle age.’ Of course, that’s me. Do you think Ed could have written that for anyone else? For one of these *girls*?” She waved her hand around the room, and I gave her a timid smile.

Another song began, the third fast one in a row. Ned and Geneva were at it still. He was trying some flamenco-style moves, really goofy, but he was making it work, so the other dancers stopped to give them room. Geneva fluttered in tangerine satin around him, and she giggled when people clapped to the music and cheered.

Inez Burke bit her bottom lip. Deep lines formed between her brows. Ned’s face was swollen and red, and when he came near, he was panting. He had lost the wreath again. Inez dropped her cigarette and rushed toward her husband, yelling, “Ed!” Her voice carried a warning as shrill as a siren, the sound of Professor Burke’s old name filling the room as he crashed to the floor.





Corporate America Benjamin Thurston
Printmaking · Double Exposed Photo Etching · 11 in × 15 in

Traffic Light Imitating Feeling

Richard Brancato

Poetry

Foot on the brake
and stop

everything



Captivated | Alicia Kelly
Photography · 35mm Black and White · 9.5 in × 12 in

Nuts and Bolts

Mary Lawrie Shea

Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · 3.5 in x 8.5 in

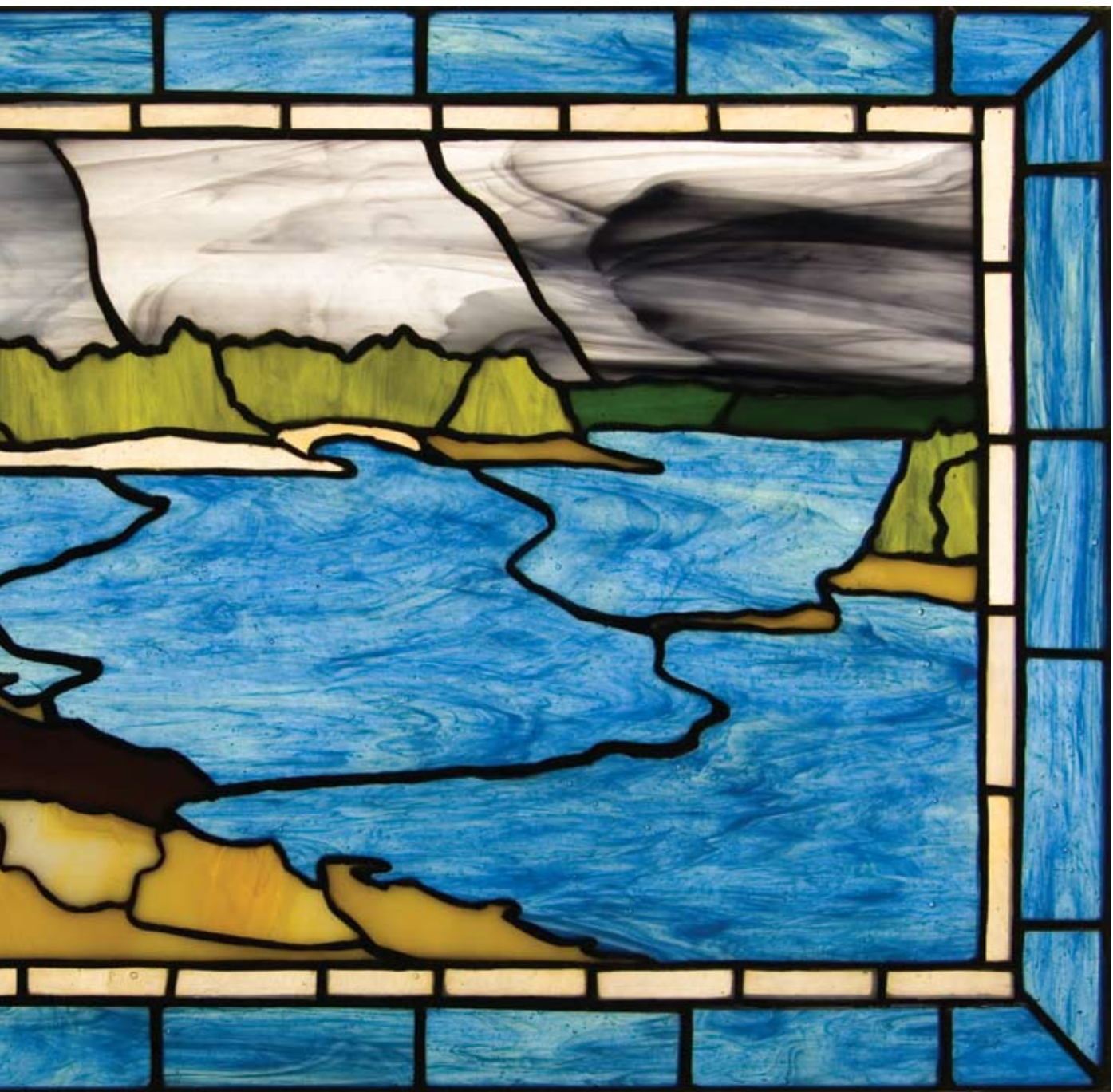


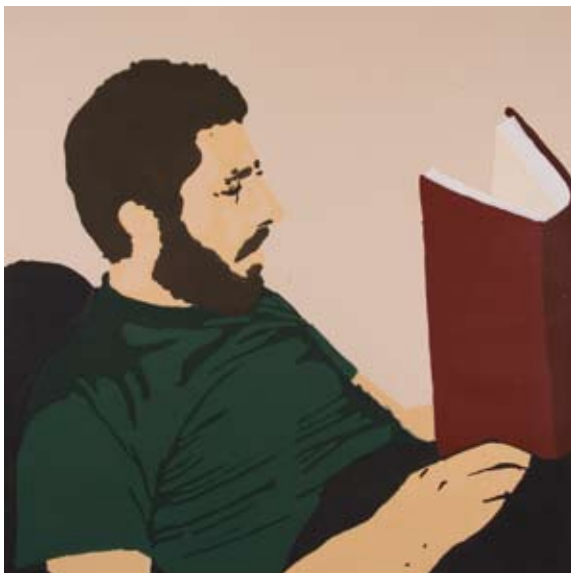


Islands of the Sheepscot

Juliana Williams

Three-Dimensional · Leaded Stained Glass · 22 in × 18 in





My Thought Process:
The Places Where I Think

Sean Leary

Printmaking · Screenprint · 23 in × 19 in

Folk Flare Maggie Fiedler
Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · 5 in diameter × 9 in



Oilcan Tea Set

Jason Niemann

Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · Teapot 6 in diameter × 6 in



Equality

Madeleine Patch

Photography · Digital · 8.5 in × 11 in



Self-Portrait #2: Pimp My Ride

Jason Niemann

Photography · Digital · 14 in x 11 in



Hoarding

Sean Janson

Poetry

Now the cold
has come up through the floorboards,
and it's gnawing—
He lost his eyes
so long ago, I cannot remember
the shape of my mother's face
or the dates
on the newspapers
we have stacked floor to ceiling.
Last night there were
fourteen grand pianos standing
in the parlor, grey with plaster,
silent as elephants,
and the clavichord nestled in
among them, buffalo-black—
and boxes lashed together with rope
stretched across the corridor.
Eighteen rakes in the hallway
next to the baby carriages
next to the rusty bikes
and the pin-up calendars
in the kitchen
outdated phonebooks filling
the closets, names from
Delaware, names from Utah,
Washington, Mississippi,
places I have never been.

Who are these people
who vote,
who pay their bills?
Who do the washing up
after the quiet meal
in the quiet of the house?
Who has forced them into
this terrible decision?

We boarded the windows,
in the winter; that was '34.
Harlem has gotten so
much darker.
Homer died this morning and I knelt
and took his face
in my hands, smoothed his beard,
felt among the yards of silk
the yards of wool cloth
and the clocks, their guts
ripped out, the eight
live cats roaming around
like thrumming wires
and the inexplicable bowling balls
like the skulls of shipwreck victims
rubbed smooth by the sea,
the octopoid umbrellas
tied together at their stalks
the interminable chassis of Model T's
rigged for crude electricity.

I found the horse's jawbone
under the kitchen sink,
under the pickling jars,
under the appendix.



Untitled Kurt M. Schleeauf
Photography · Large Format Black and White · 16 in × 20 in



Sense

Leah VanVaerenewyck

Nonfiction

The strangest group of people lived in an orange house next door to me. The Dalvios had wood piled high in their backyard year round, to heat their house during the winter months. Unheard of throughout Sharon's suburban sprawl. For years, their family bathed one night a week, sharing the same tub of water that had been heated on the stove. A number of cars—all of them junk, including one race car circa 1963—cluttered half of their side yard, and the back was a graveyard to not-yet-laid-to-rest lawnmowers. A good portion of my childhood was spent in that side yard playing kickball, yelling *my team's gonna kick your team's butt*, running bases, ignorant and free. The three boys next door, my brother, and I spent the rest of our time riding bikes and learning how to steal candy from the Cumberland Farms up Main Street.

One day, when he and I were twelve, the middle boy, Jackson, and I rode alone and stopped at a path that led through the woods over to the next street. With our bikes balanced between our legs, sweaty hands wringing rubber handlebar grips, we tilted our helmeted heads aside and leaned into the most awkward and fantastic kiss of our lives. We enjoyed three weeks of electric exploration, until he approached me behind the dojo, where he and his older brother Drew practiced karate, and said, "Drew and I agree that you're not my type." Drew's neighborhood girlfriend Susie had used the same line on him just hours before. "But," he said, "we can still ride bikes and play kickball." I peddled home and shut myself in my room to write horrific four-line poetry, bemoaning my loss, "b" lines rhyming mad and sad.

At age twenty-four, his wife of two years, who had just given birth to their second child, decided he wasn't her type, and filed for a divorce that sent him back to the orange house. I too had moved back in with my parents after trying on adult independence for a few years, living with Matt. We were still very much in love when we split up—the problem was we had made all our youthful mistakes with each other.

Lonely, and having forgotten the time Jackson left my heart shattered (which rhymed with *I thought I mattered*), we tried it again. Well, first we went out for my birthday, got twenty-four-and-living-with-our-parents drunk, and fucked in the back of his Denali sometime around sunrise while people drove by on their way to work. Afterward, while stretched out on the leather seats, we said things like, *It was meant to be* and *Where have you been all my life*, each of us trying to forget that there had been someone before. Touching him was almost as thrilling as touching Matt had been; energy pulsed through me, commanded me, released me from mind and delivered me to body. I settled back into him comfortably, naïve enough to believe that those days in the side yard still belonged to us.

About a month after, in late November, I sat in the RegattaBar, listening to a jazz ensemble. I was hosting a function for Great Expectations, a dating agency—or singles' resource center—as employees were instructed to call it. Nervous, middle-aged guests exchanged hesitant glances. I watched them watching each other and tried to remember what some of them had written under the section titled "What You Are Looking For" on their single's profile. Mostly, the "what" they were looking for was defined by education, socioeconomic status, religion and race: there are types of people worthy of love. I considered how fascinating it had been to see two people, who did not meet each other's written requirements, leave together after previous functions. As the piano, xylophone, drum, saxophone, and bass players pushed out individual melodies until they crashed together in a glorious crescendo, I wondered who might leave together that night.

I sent Jackson a text message. *You'd love the show. I wish you were here. Call you soon. xoxo.* I'd taken to communicating only by his cell phone after realizing that his parents, Bob and Cary, were far more likely to answer the house line than he was. Bob would ask questions about our plans, suggest that we stay in to spend quality time with the family, and generally attempt to convince me of something, though he would never say exactly what he meant: Jackson and I were a mismatch. Cary would always remind me about upcoming divorce hearings to make sure I hadn't forgotten that Jackson was still married, perhaps to suggest I had no business messing around with her son.

These conversations made me feel like I did after I said I thought it was stupid that they had to go to church before they could open presents on Christmas morning, and Cary stopped letting the Dalvio kids play on our trampoline next door. My brother Jeremy wouldn't talk to me until Cary finally agreed to let him play with the boys, but only in their yard. My mother tried to explain that I had insulted their faith. Since my father had refused to let my mother indoctrinate my brother and me as kids, that day was the beginning of my religious education. Christmas had always been about family and gifts at my house. I didn't even know who Jesus was. Though my mother tried to explain what church had to do with Christmas, instilling the concept of God in a person who had lived twelve years without it is likely less possible than removing it from someone who lived twelve years with it. My ban was never officially lifted, so

most of the time Jackson and I spent together was in a bar, and most of my time in the Dalvio house was spent drunk, after the bar.

When the show ended, I headed to Jackson's under the assumption that we'd be going out. As soon as my headlights flashed in their dining room window, he called my cell and said, "Come in. Play some Hearts with us."

"I dunno. I had some wine. I'm not sure I feel like—"

"You're always welcome here," he interrupted. "Come on in," he said and hung up.

I parked on the lawn and prepared myself to go in. I stepped out onto the grass, and as I made my way up the front steps, I thought *Smile and be agreeable*. That had been my job all night. Still, a group of agency members was far less intimidating than the Dalvio family. The members were groping alongside you, trying to find their way in life, or just something to hold onto; the Dalvios knew the way, and, if you wanted to make it, you had to hold onto them.

I opened the door and Cary, Bob, Jackson's sister Nicholetta, her boyfriend Chris, and their baby Karina—in her own gurgling, eye-shifting way—greeted me. Jackson emerged from the bathroom wearing jeans and a white undershirt that seemed to enrich the olive tint of his skin. He stood in the doorway, stretching his arms above his head and smiling deeply. My attraction to him felt inappropriate, and in some way, that made it grow immensely.

Making my way to a chair on the far side of the dining room, cluttered with laundry baskets, baby toys, and arts and craft supplies, I said, "I'm not sure I remember how to play. I've only played on the computer before."

"It's not a serious game. Bob always cheats on the score card," Cary assured me with a smile. "No matter though. We're all in good spirits tonight. Michael is home for Thanksgiving!"

"Oh! That's great. Is he here now?" I asked. "When did he get in?"

"He's out with Ben," Jackson said. "You know Ben, right, from down the street?"

"Oh yeah, it's so weird to me that they're grown up. Did he say how training is going?" I asked.

"He hasn't talked much about it. But I can tell he's glad to be back," Cary said. "He's only home for a few days, and then it's off to a base in California until they go to Iraq."

"Let's get this game going," Chris said. "I wanna get Karina home to bed soon."

"We'll play a hand or two together and then head out, all right?" Jackson said as he sat down in the chair beside me and rested a hand on my leg.

"Whatever goes," I said, wondering if Cary could tell he was touching me under the table and feeling uncomfortable about it.

"So, you're looking pretty. How was work tonight?" Bob asked as Chris dealt the cards.

"It was okay. The show was good, but I'm not sure there were any matches made in heaven." I immediately regretted my word choice, but perhaps I was being hypersensitive. Nervous, I continued: "It's really just about getting people together so they can feel the energy. You know, connect." Cary ran a pudgy hand through her dark hair, graying at the roots. I felt judged, and imagined her saying a prayer for my soul by her bedside, her hands a temple beneath her chin.

"Well, I wish I had some energy. This one's been keeping me up every night!" Nicholetta moaned, her tired eyes lighting up for just a moment. "Jackson, would you rock her for a few? My arms are tired."

Jackson took Karina in his arms and stood to rock her while I organized the hand, trying to remember if I wanted to collect all the hearts or get rid of them. Once the game was in play, I watched Jackson with Karina in his arms, and a warm feeling I still cannot name swelled inside me.

Just around the time I realized I didn't want the hearts but had almost all of them, Jackson passed a sleeping Karina back to Nicholetta and asked, "Would you mind bringing me to Stoughton-real quick?" blending the words together, speeding them along, perhaps hoping they would go unconsidered.

"Sure," I said, hoping his family didn't know why he wanted to go to Stoughton. Real quick. Because I did.

A few weeks before, I'd gone with Jackson to a pub there to meet his friend, who turned out to be his dealer. I couldn't help but think then of the time Cary stopped Jackson and me on our way out the door to show him a highlighted passage in the Bible. It said something about heeding man's laws or his prayers would become an abomination to the Lord.

"My gosh!" Jackson said, picking up the cards on the table. "You've got all the points here! Good thing we're leaving. You're running us into the ground!" He tossed the cards onto the table and smiled, looking at me like my mistakes were what made me worth loving. It's hard for me, even now, to reconcile the way he could be in moments like those—sweet and gentle, even boyish—with the way he would be later that night.

Outside we finally greeted each other properly, naturally, with a deep slow kiss. It felt like we had been kissing all along, as though time collapsed and the second before that one, we had been straddling our bikes by the woods path.

On the way to Stoughton we laughed and sang out of tune. Biting autumn air zipped past the cigarette smoke streaming through our cracked windows. When we pulled into the pub, Jackson told me to park next to a red truck. My amazing capacity to acknowledge only what I want to had allowed me to forget what we went there for until I was parked next to that truck I'd seen once before. After Jackson got what he came for, he asked, "Wanna go in for a dirty?"

"Sure," I said, supposing I shouldn't.

Inside we took seats at the bar. After Jackson ordered two martinis, he pulled my stool closer to him and hooked his arm around my shoulder. I leaned into him, pressing my nose to the soft skin on his neck.

"This is what I mean about energy. Heat. Pheromones," I said, breathing the words onto his skin.

"Yeah," he replied, drumming his fingers on the bar top. "Gotta hit the can. Be right back."

When he returned, his eyes were hard. Looking into them, all I could think to say was, "They don't have olive juice."

"Whatever. I want to get home soon to see Michael.

We've gotta straighten some things out. He's pissed my stuff's in his room. I don't mind giving it up while he's here, but c'mon. He's been gone for months."

"Did you guys fight?"

"Yeah. He left angry. Actually, he came home angry, and that made it worse."

"Then let's throw these back and head home," I suggested. He finished his and then mine.

On the ride back to his house, Jackson told me how much he missed his children, how he wanted them to know me, how disappointed he was in himself for failing in marriage. It's always been in moments like those, when someone shares so much of themselves, of their suffering, when I feel intense isolation. All I could do was listen and watch his attempt to escape from pain bring him deeper inside.

When we pulled up, Michael was standing outside. "You get your stuff out of my space yet?" he asked.

"Michael, Michael. C'mon. Let's work this out," Jackson started, patting his pockets in search of a smoke. "Let's have a talk," he said, pulling Michael into the side yard to try to smooth things over.

I sat on the front steps where I could hear their voices, but not the words, until Jackson yelled, "What the fuck'd you just say to me?"

"You heard me," Michael said.

"You're not a fucking Marine. I work with veterans. They live by a code. They don't threaten their family. You wanna cut my throat and watch me bleed dry?" Jackson thrashed his arms, bounced at the knee.

Michael was still. "Yes."

Jackson thrust his arms around Michael's shoulders. "Fucking do it then." They grappled, each tearing at the other's coat, low grunts escaping their lips and getting lost in the night air. They were locked: eyes to eyes, nose to nose, like two antlered beasts.

Bob and Cary burst through the door behind me. Bob ran across the yard and got between the

brothers. Cary stood on the stair beside me. We watched Bob tear his sons apart. Cary looked down at me and said, "I think you should leave."

"Take him with you," added Bob, dragging Jackson by his arm across the yard. "Take him for a drive. He needs to cool down. Don't bring him back until he's sobered up," he said as we got in the car.

With no intention to sober, Jackson borrowed a dollar bill from me, bent forward in the seat and sniffed away. "He wasn't like that before he left. He comes home and treats me like I don't belong. I got kicked out by my wife, and then he tells me, they tell me, I have no place in their house. Fuck."

"He probably feels like he doesn't belong, Jackson. He's been instilled with rage, turned into a killing machine."

"You're right, you're right. But I tried to apologize. To fix it."

"You can't fix it," I suggested.

We eventually decided to go to a hotel, where we would stay for the next two days. While we drove there, Will Dailey sang, *I'm in love with your madness. I'm holding on so carefully. Lust roots itself in lunacy. I wanna know how you suffer. I won't let you feel too cold.* Jackson dipped back into the bag. I realized I could not reason with him, only offer comfort, though I didn't realize that I couldn't fix it either.

At the hotel, Jackson unraveled into chaos, reminding himself he had to walk like Jesus between lines. Despite my efforts to stay awake and comfort him, I drifted into sleep just before the new day broke. I had a wonderful, half-waking dream where deep, glorious red, blue, and green shifting shadows wavered about, moving steadily upwards, meeting each other, blending for a time and then falling away, but not before their blend produced a new shadow of a deeper shade to ascend. Waking in time to remember the vision, I wanted to show it to Jackson, share with him the peaceful feeling it roused in me, but I could only tell him.

"Jackson, you know how life forms often seem to be in competition, but are really working together in a complex system? What about ideas? I just dreamt that ideas are like organisms: breeding, evolving. I had the notion that eventually, there will only be pure ideas, functioning in harmony. Do you think that can happen?"

He looked bewildered, but said he could kind of see what I meant. I knew that he couldn't.

I went home the next day and found that my parents had allied themselves with Cary and Bob. They stood in the kitchen ready to charge me with their ideas of the way things should be. My mother accused me of engaging in adultery. Through tears, I told her I don't live my life by divine command and that on this we would never agree. Though my father was not aligned ideologically, his aim was the same as theirs, and he stood there next to my mother confirming that he too was against me. Of course, as with any battle, their opposition only perpetuated the force to which they were opposed. I packed a bag and returned to the hotel.

Reminding myself to stay composed, I eased open the room door. Jackson was still sleeping. I placed my bag down, slowly, deliberately, as if completely controlled movements could restore order to my life. I crawled onto the bed and lay on my side, facing him with my arms curled up, fists tucked beneath my chin. He opened his eyes and looked in mine.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Your mother needs to keep her Bible out of my life."

Resolving to put conflict behind us, that night Jackson and I went out for a birthday celebration for Jane, a mutual friend of mine and Matt's.

On the deck outside the Vira Café where we celebrated with Jane, confused moths fluttered in the warm November air and, approaching the light, tempted to tangle with the heat. With the help of wine and birthday spirit, I felt relaxed, until Jane told me, "Matt might be coming here."

"Shit, should I leave?"

"No. I want you to stay. He's a child about us being friends."

"I want to stay too, Janie, but I really don't want to deal with any drama. Let me see how Jackson feels about the situation." It had been months since I'd seen Matt, and my recent transfer of affection had pushed the memory of him aside.

Jackson suggested that we stay to see how it would go. He had a mild temperament as long as he wasn't high; however, the same could not be said of Matt. When the lights flickered for last call, I thanked energy for assuming a course of flow that allowed a peaceful night. Jackson took my hand as we left the bar.

"Is that the guy?" I heard a familiar voice call from down the parking lot. It was Matt's brother, Ted. I moved in front of Jackson and stretched my arms behind me, wrapping his body. I did not see Matt before Ted barreled down the parking lot and batted me to the side.

Matt and Ted pushed and punched Jackson to the far side of the lot, up against a wooden fence. He fell to the ground and bent his arms and legs up before his face and torso. The camel soles of his boots jerked each time the brothers kicked his ribs and face. I watched as the two night stalkers pummeled their prey. A residential building loomed behind the fence, its windows alive with a dim light glowing.

The battle lasted only a short time, but the seconds stretched out to trap us each in eternity. When someone broke up the fight, Jackson stood erect, rivers of blood flowing down his face. He put his hands out, palms to the sky, and received a small navy blue towel offered by a café employee.

"You guys need to grow up," he said, crossing the parking lot. "Leah, get in the car."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" I screamed at Matt.

"Stay out of my fucking town," he responded. And that was an answer. We'd crossed an imaginary line into a territory he arbitrarily claimed as his own; we weren't allowed.

I got in the car, and as I backed out, Matt glared at me. His mouth pursed in tight, rage-filled wrinkles. His nostrils flared, pulling in and pushing out heaving breaths, fueling the fire inside.

That night, at the hotel, Jackson and I came together with a force equal to all those that had pushed us away. We harnessed the night's energy, the passion bonding our urgent lips together. Senseless fury spurred reckless affection. Wounds not yet healed spilled blood on my face so we were both masked.

Higher potential moved to lower potential, and briefly, there was harmony. We loved the way animals love, ignorant and free, crashing together in a glorious crescendo.

The next time we were in bed was the last. He leaned into me and whispered, “You have to open your heart and accept the love of Jesus.” I knew then that he believed his solution must also be mine, and that not one of us is free.

My mind frequently returns to a conversation I had with Bob once when he answered the house phone. It was the only time I dominated a conversation with anyone in that house. Truthfully, we rarely participated in conversations—they were always ministering unto me. He asked about school, and I told him of my love for learning, for synthesizing ideas, and said that I hoped to get Jackson to read more. I was aware that the only book the Dalvios read was the Good Book. I said that if I didn’t learn, then I would only see in one mode. I told him that if all you know is red, then everything you see looks red even when it isn’t. And so today, we go on seeing in different modes, experiencing different worlds, and all the while we are caught in time right next door to each other.





Mokume Tigers Eye

Patrick Fahy

*Three-Dimensional · Mokume Gane,
Silver and Tigers Eye · 2.5 in × 4 in × 1 in*





Decommissioned II Rose Esson-Dawson
Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · 14 in × 14 in × 15 in

Irizumi: A Path to Self-Identity: Japanese Rockstar

Anna Takahama

Photography · Digital · 10 in × 8 in



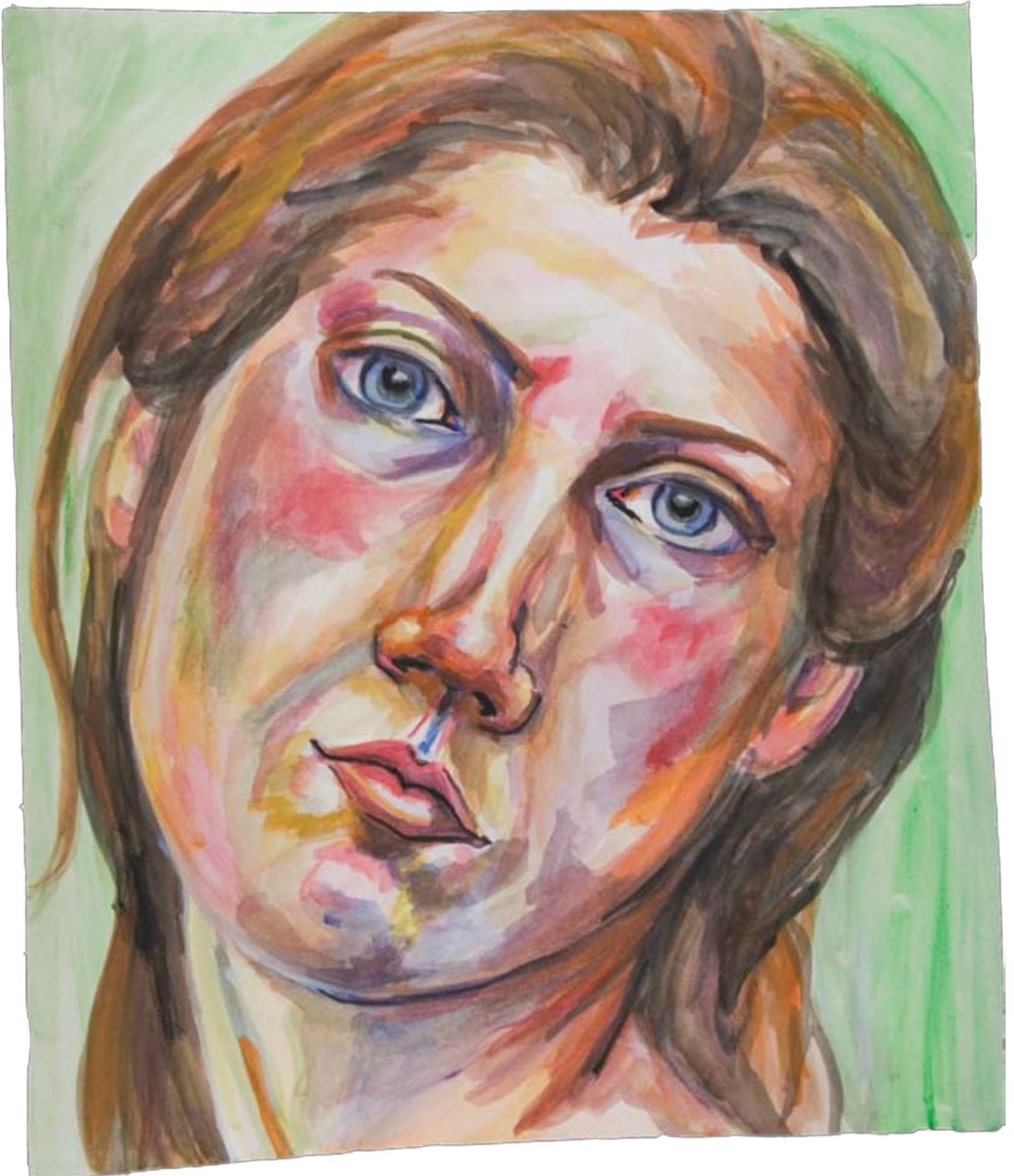


Winter Box **Laurie A. Riley**
*Three-Dimensional · Sterling Silver, Bronze,
Stained Glass, 60/40 Solder and Copper Wire · 4 in diameter × 2.5 in*

Fauvism

Adrienne Berkland

Painting · Watercolor · 19 in × 22 in



The Elder

Derek T. Hambly

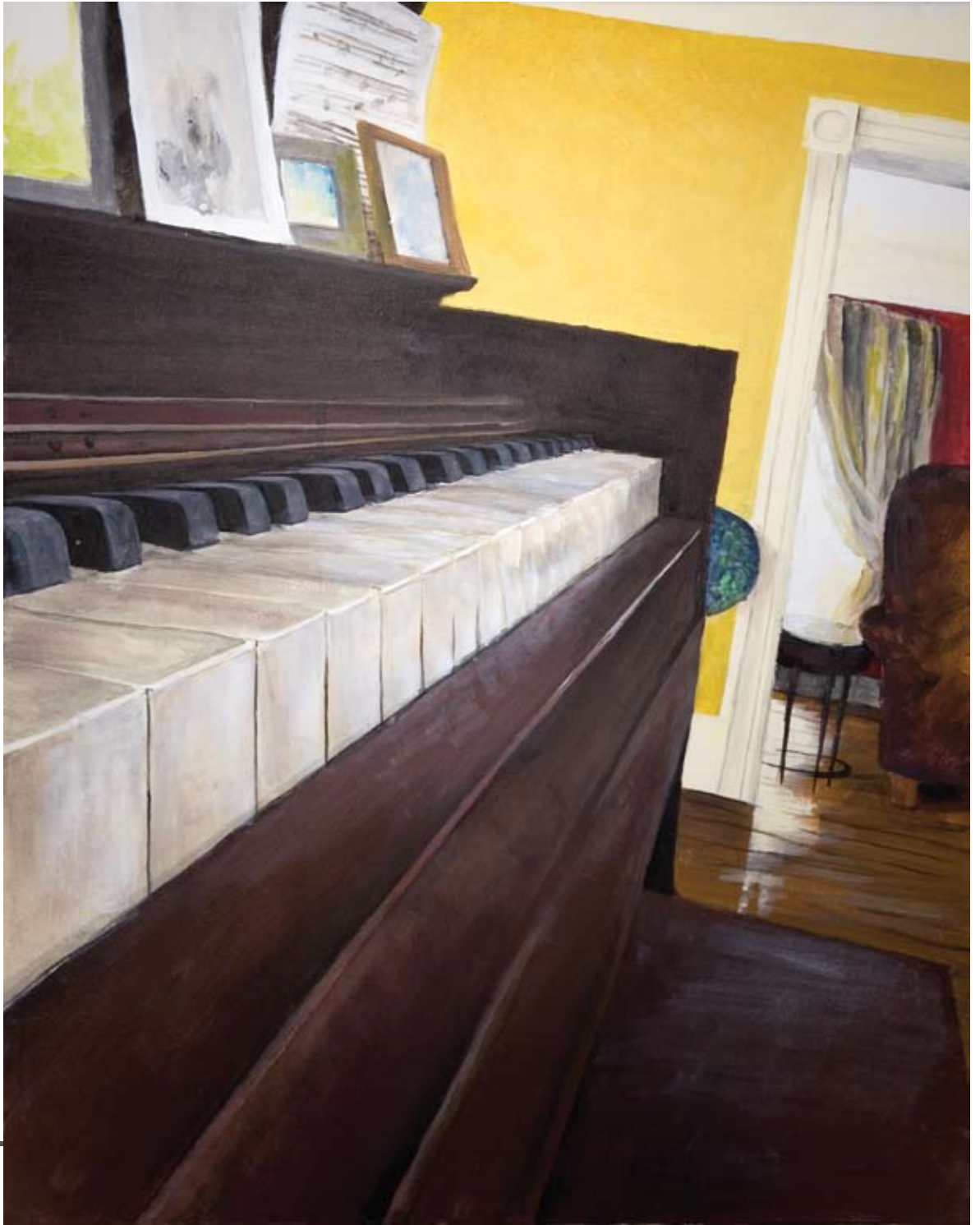
Three-Dimensional · Stoneware · Bottle 5.5 in × 12 in × 7.5 in



Piano

Kate Kelland

Painting · Acrylic · 23.5 in × 30 in





Display Nicole Fontenault
Drawing · Soft Pastel · 32 in × 24 in

I Would Like to Smoke 1000000 Cigarettes, Please

Sean Janson

Poetry

Or litter as much as possible, thank you. I won't be so cliché as to mention whiskey at this point but if you don't mind I believe I'll stick my tongue in that electrical socket before we enter into a number of sexually loaded conflicts that end in shrieking and disgrace and the neighbors suddenly in their bathrobes. In addition, I think at this point it would be appropriate for you to play Steely Dan as loudly as possible on your stereo in the middle of the night, while I look around in this alleyway for something to plagiarize, the pilgrim's soul over there nodding by the oil-drum fire, or the baton tap on I beam *ching* shaking out its pockets near the lighted street. Oh the sobbing of the bells, bells, bells! They need that space to reverberate. But if you find a way to freebase A Minor, well my friend, we might just have ourselves a party. I'll do my best to abandon as many kittens as I can in a period of three weeks while you accost pedestrians for interesting facts in your best Peter Lorre voice. Eventually you'll know enough to tell me that *Titus Andronicus* has 5.2 atrocities per act, which is one every 97 lines, and so when I get to the stage direction *Enter the empress' sons with Lavinia, her hands cut off, her tongue cut out, and ravished*, I won't be particularly surprised. You can throw things off the overpass while I work on my master's thesis on *Antonio's Revenge*, where I talk a lot about Julio's arms and legs sticking out of the casserole baked for his father, and the child-actors pulling each others' tongues out, and I will read to you particularly astute passages, *perhaps the titular character understood the concept of garnishé a little too well*, and you will titter pleasantly while you're committing accounting fraud at the expense of everyone else's 401(k), but be careful not to step outside and take a good lungful of cold, and perhaps look up slightly, to where the moon is perched like a single tear, because—well, hell, then it won't be so funny anymore, will it?



Beach Dune Grant Ferro
Photography · Digital · 28 in x 8 in



Scarred

David Bevens, Jr.

Nonfiction

I knew from the rumors in school that Dustin Andrews was a kid to stay away from, someone who was psychotic. Not only did people say he was a bully, but there were stories about how he'd killed birds and rabbits by pelting them with rocks. I wanted nothing to do with him, and so when he called my house and invited me over, I was filled with dread when my mother said I had to go.

"It would be rude," she insisted, "to decline the invitation for no reason."

"But there *is* a reason, Mama. He's crazy! Nobody likes him!"

She put her foot down, literally, and said, "Well if everyone jumped off a bridge, would you?"

She had me with that one. For the longest time, actually, I wondered why people were always jumping off bridges. I followed her to the door as I tugged on my maroon Mighty Ducks Starter jacket. It was fairly new and, when we got in the van, my mother warned me about keeping it clean. "I'd rather you catch a cold than dirty up that jacket." I prayed she was joking. Then I prayed that Dustin's house had exploded and that I could go home and do homework. Then I prayed that I would never have to pray to do homework again. She turned left onto Dustin's street. Every house was still intact. I slumped in the front seat of our minivan.

"What time do you want me to be home?" I asked, hoping she would tell me that she wanted me back before dinner.

"It doesn't matter."

Those words killed me. My dream of her letting all her parenting skills go was coming true at the most inopportune time.

"We'll see what Ms. Andrews says, okay?"

I gave her a stern stare before looking out the window, where it seemed even the day was against me. Gray skies, yellow leaves clinging to life on their branches, dying grass. The houses on Dustin's street were old and most likely haunted by the ghosts of children who perished while playing with Dustin. My mother pulled into the Andrews' driveway.

She walked me to the front door of the old, two-family house. I rang the bell. It buzzed weakly, as if it were clearing off dust from its old, copper wires, like it was buzzing for the first time in years. The wires probably led to a box, which was most likely in Dustin's dungeon bedroom. I heard footsteps, and then the door opened.

I never watched David Letterman when I was little, but I do remember seeing a caricature of him in my weekly literature: *TV Guide*. He had this great gap in between his two front teeth. One could fit a Mack truck through that gap according to the artist's rendition of the late-night talk show host. But Letterman's gap was nothing compared to Dustin's piano-keyed grin. Dustin's curly brown hair sprouted from his skull like a Chia Pet. He was wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. He had squinty, beady, little eyes. They had something behind them, a sort of mischief, or something worse that I could not quite place.

"Hey, David," he greeted me as he opened the massive front door to the foyer.

"Hello, Dustin," I replied, trying to sound as pleasant as a nine-year-old in dire straits could.

My mother and I walked into his house. My mom went to the living room with his mother. As Dustin led me to his room, I could hear my mother's distinct laughter as she and Ms. Andrews chatted it up. His room was adorned with Legos constructed into tall castles, giant pirate ships, and skyscrapers. I wondered if Dustin's bed was made of the little plastic blocks too.

"This is Castle Skull," he told me, pointing to a castle about half my size. "And this is Robin Hood's Hideout."

I was impressed. I didn't think that Dustin would have more imagination (and toys) than my friends. He showed me all the new, fancy toys around his room. He was the only child of a single mother and thusly was the king of the household. I had three sisters and was not used to that. My mom poked her head through his doorway.

"How's seven sound, Davy?" she asked.

"Seven is great, Mrs. Bevans!" Dustin interjected. "Seven's good, right *Davy*?" He looked at me with an intensity that created a lump in my throat.

I gulped. "Yeah, Mom, seven is good." At home I called her Mama.

"Okay. Have fun." She flashed her gummy smile and then she was gone.

Dustin walked over to Castle Skull and began playing with some Lego guys, a white knight and a black knight and a pirate. I knelt down and began playing with a pirate ship.

"*Don't touch that*," Dustin said coldly. He placed the white knight on top of one of Castle Skull's turrets.

I straightened up.

He continued, "I built that yesterday. I don't want anyone touching it." He put down the black knight and the pirate. "Let me get my coat. We can go play outside."

"Um, sure," I replied. He left the room. I looked at the Lego ship and wondered if it would float in the tub; probably not. I investigated the rest of his room. My eyes stopped on the Venetian blinds. Each was drawn at the same length as the others and turned at the same angle. Dustin reentered the room wearing a puffy winter coat.

"I get paid five dollars a week to keep the blinds like that. And another five to turn the lights on and off."

I stared at him in disbelief and slowly zipped up my coat. I found it hard to believe that he got five bucks for flicking a switch and another five for pulling some strings, especially since I got five bucks for walking the dog, doing the dishes, cleaning my room, and taking out the trash. "Let's go outside," I said. Maybe he would tell the truth out there.

It had gotten colder outside, and I shivered underneath my big, maroon jacket. We walked down the stoop and into his front yard. A playhouse stood behind the tall, looming bushes that cut the yard off from the street and the rest of the world. Dustin was walking behind me. The legs of the playhouse, which were held by crumbling concrete, were rusting. The swing's tattered rubber seat swayed with the slight breeze; there was a hole in the canvas roof of the little playhouse on top. The thing was a deathtrap. Perhaps this was where Dustin slaughtered his victims.

"Wanna play on the fort?" he asked.

It looked kind of stable; but, then again, when you're a kid, anything looks stable. I sat on the swing and began pumping my legs.

Dustin climbed up a ratty-looking cargo net to the playhouse and began firing a pretend gun at pretend enemy soldiers. "They're flanking us!" he screamed, turning left and right shooting his imaginary rifle. "Charlie in the bush!" he yelled, unpinning a phantom grenade.

I decided to join in, despite not knowing who Charlie was, and, from my seat, I started shooting a pistol. "Enemy at twelve o'clock!" I yelled, firing away. I ran out of bullets and decided to switch to a flame-thrower. I made a whooshing noise as I took down hordes of enemies. This was very effective because, in Dustin's mind, it seemed to have stabilized our defenses for the time being. He stopped shooting and started climbing on the playhouse roof.

"Nice job, Sergeant," he told me as he started climbing the bar that held the swings. His feet dangled to and fro as he inched, hand-over-hand, toward me.

"Thanks," I replied, resuming my swinging.

"But not good enough. You need some training."

"Yes, sir," I replied jokingly. Instead of saluting properly, I slapped myself in the forehead with the back of my hand, sticking out my tongue and wiggling my fingers. It was something my uncles had taught me.

Dustin let go of the swing set's bar and landed on the dusty ground near me. "I'm serious, *Davy*." His voice was once again mocking, his tone malevolent. "I didn't bring you over here for nothin'." At this, he jumped back up on the bar, pulling himself up. He brought his knees to his chest repeatedly. Between breaths, he explained his "training." "You see, *Davy*, you need ripples...on your stomach. It's the only way...to show that you're strong.... The only way to defend yourself." He jumped back down.

"From what?" I asked as I got off the swing and took a step back from him.

"From bullies. Bad guys." He lifted his shirt up and showed off the ripples he spoke of. All I saw were baby fat rolls.

I didn't say anything. I was never one to say something, anyway; I always kept my mouth shut, avoided conflict at all costs. I was your typical, scaredy-cat fourth-grader: scrawny and smart

enough to know that I should avoid fights. Dustin may not have had abs, but there was no doubt in my mind that he could've taken me easily.

Dustin continued, "You're too skinny. Too weak." He punched me in the arm. I tried not to flinch, but it hurt. "Get up there."

I jumped up but couldn't grab the bar, so I used the swing as a step. Dustin scoffed at this. I gripped the bar with two hands, and began mimicking his abdominal exercises. Dustin watched; he was studying my technique it seemed. After a few crunches, the area in my arm where Dustin punched me began to hurt. I jumped down.

"That it?" he asked with arms crossed.

"Why do I have to train, Dustin? I don't really want to." I was surprised at myself for standing up, albeit meekly, to someone.

He punched me in the arm again; and again, I flinched. "That's why, *Davy*." He punched me a third time.

My fists clenched, and my eyes welled up with tears. I wanted to attack him, but figured he could kick my butt. I dropped my fists and tried to hold back the tears. "I want to go home," I told him.

He looked genuinely shocked, which, in turn, shocked me. "Don't go, don't go," he pleaded. "I'm sorry." A breeze kicked up, and the lifeless tree branches rustled. A few dead leaves fell to the ground.

I stared at him long and hard, wondering if he was really sorry. "I don't want to train anymore."

"We won't," he said, relieved that I was staying. "Let's play something else."

"What?" I asked, leery of his answer. The breeze had gotten stronger and the rustling tree branches became louder. My eyes were still watery from the punches; I wiped them dry.

"Ever play cops and robbers?" What a stupid question, I thought to myself. Who hasn't played cops and robbers? I confirmed his question with a silent nod. He reached into his jeans' pocket, searching for something. He pulled out a pair of handcuffs. "Let's play cops and robbers."

He turned and led me through an opening in the tall bushes that lined his front yard. A tiny branch scratched my face. He explained his version of the game to me as he led me across the street and a few houses down from his. Our footsteps and voices echoed down the vacant street. "One of us is the cop and one of us is the robber. The robber has to hide, and the cop has to chase him down and handcuff him." We turned into the yard of a big house.

The house was a fading yellow color. The paint was chipping and some of the wood siding seemed rotten. The trim was burgundy and also in need of a paint job. Weeds grew out of the foundation of the house; the cellar windows were barely visible. Some weeds grew so tall it appeared that they were trying to grab the house and pull it down into the earth. The windows were old and warped, distorting what images I saw through them. "Once the cop handcuffs the robber, he becomes the robber, and the robber becomes the cop," Dustin continued. "Then the cop has to escape from the handcuffs and chase the robber." He whispered the rules of the game as we headed toward a large, chain-link fence. "Make sense?" he asked me.

I turned and scoped out the yard. "Yeah, perfect sense." The grass in this yard seemed deader than the grass in any other yard I'd been in before. The trees were completely denuded.

Dustin took my right wrist and cuffed it. "You be the cop first." He linked the other cuff to the fence. "I'll go hide."

I looked at him. I felt tricked, like in the cop shows where the undercover cop cuffs the criminal after they have worked together. Somehow, though, the roles of good guy and bad guy were reversed. "How do I get out?" I asked nervously.

"With the key," Dustin said grinning. He held up a tiny little key and then placed it on the ground a good length away from me. "Count to ten. Then get the key. Then come find me." For good measure, he moved the key even further away with his foot. He whispered close to my ear: "Oh. This is Mr. Salerno's house. He doesn't like kids in his yard. He's got a big dog that usually chases me around the street. Try to be as quiet as you can; you don't want the dog to eat you." With that, he smiled that piano-key grin and ran away.

I counted to ten.

Reaching for the key, I stretched my cuffed arm away from the fence and with my left arm reached for the key. It was several feet away. I tried again and realized my attempts were futile. I stretched my left leg out and still no success. I extended my leg as far as I could, the cuff on my wrist pushing up against the heel of my hand, but that didn't work either. I tried with my hand again. It was useless.

I leaned against the fence and let out an exasperated breath. Another gust of wind kicked up, blowing the bare trees. It appeared that Mr. Salerno liked to keep his yard neat, so, when the wind blew, what few leaves there were floated discernibly around. They floated wherever they wanted, it seemed. I was jealous. One leaf flew from a filthy birdbath to an evergreen hedge that sat underneath one of the warped-glass windows. I tried to stare into the house, seeing if anyone was home, my arm and shoulder bent behind me at an awkward angle. I saw a shadowy figure pass by. I straightened up and pushed my back as much as I could against the fence. I stood in a state of fear. I didn't know if it was Mr. Salerno or the dog.

I stretched for the key again. I used all my free limbs, but it was still to no avail. My wrist was getting raw from the friction of the handcuff; Dustin had put it on as tightly as he could. I searched the cuffs for a latch, thinking they were your run-of-the-mill toy handcuffs. There was no latch though. I wondered how Dustin got his hands on actual handcuffs and from whom he'd stolen them. Perhaps, I thought, he not only killed other fourth-graders, but he killed police officers too. I shook my hand in anger, and the cuffs jangled against the fence. I stopped and looked at the window again. I wanted to scream for help, but didn't, because Mr. Salerno and his man-eating dog would've heard me. My arm dangling bodiless from the fence was an image that I could not shake from my mind. I decided that I could not make a noise.

In my agonized silence, I searched for something, anything, to grab the key. There were no sticks around. I slumped against the fence again. My eyes welled with tears, and I fell to my knees. My arm began to hurt and my wrist was getting rawer. I wanted to scream for help in anger and in pain. I kicked at the dirt. I could hear traffic a few streets over.

I didn't know why Dustin was doing this to me. Maybe it was part of the training process he spoke of. Maybe he really was a psycho. Maybe he and

my mom had this plot to kill me, and he was going to take all his precious Lego castles and move into my room. After about fifteen minutes of sitting there, I stood up. Never in my life had I wanted to hurt someone so bad.

Once again, I began searching for something to grab the key. I looked behind me and saw a large stick behind the fence. I tried to poke my hand through one of the diamond-shaped openings in the fence, but it only went as far as my forearm would allow it. Like a dog, I began digging at the bottom of the fence with my foot, shoveling earth behind me. I shook my left arm out of my sleeve and let the jacket hang from my right shoulder. I bent down and started digging with my free hand. I didn't look at the ground, just at the stick; it was my only focus. I didn't notice the tips of my fingers getting torn up from the cold hard ground. Finally there was enough room for my arm to snake around the bottom of the fence. My breathing was heavy, and sweat poured from my forehead. Stretching as much as I could with the cuff on, I poked my arm through the hole I'd burrowed. The stick was within centimeters of my grasp. I extended my body as much as I could, the cuff digging into the flesh of my hand. My throat emitted a strained noise as the raw skin on my wrist began to pool with tiny amounts of blood. I grabbed the stick. Overjoyed that freedom was seconds away, I pulled the stick out from under the fence. In doing so, I cut my wrist on one of the spokes on the bottom of the fence. I yelped in pain and dropped the stick.

After I screamed, I heard a dog bark loudly and angrily. There was no time to look at the cut, though I could feel the blood trickling down my dirty hand. I picked up the stick and, with it, dragged the key toward me. The dog barked again. I undid the cuffs, and then, with a relieving clink, the handcuffs were undone. I readjusted my coat and ran. My feet plodded on the hard dirt as I sprinted through the yard, past a wire-fenced garden, and to the street. The dog kept barking; it may or may not have been let loose, but I didn't bother to turn around and check. I left the yard, Mr. Salerno, his dog, and the hanging handcuffs all behind me.

I didn't bother looking for Dustin. He could've been dead behind some random garage for all I cared. I just ran. I ran across the street and toward his house. The water in my eyes streamed to my temples. I ran past the playhouse, its swings swaying lifelessly. I ran up the stairs and into the house.

I was breathless when I reached the top of the stairs. I saw Ms. Andrews watching a daytime talk show. I went to approach her, but something to my left had caught my eye. In the room with the perfectly drawn shades and the impeccably flipped-on light switch, Dustin sat playing with his Legos.

I screamed as I ran toward him. His head turned, and a look of surprise crossed his face. None of his "training" could prepare him for the force with which I shoved him, sending him into Castle Skull. The Lego structure smashed into thousands of pieces. I drew my fist, the hand that had been cuffed for so long, and aimed for his face; but, before I could punch him, Ms. Andrews pulled me off her son.

"David!" she screamed. "What's going on here?"

"Dustin left me handcuffed to a fence!"

Ms. Andrews had her arms wrapped around my waist. My fist was still clenched, ready to strike. Dustin stumbled up from the castle ruins. A few of the blocks were stuck on his forearms.

"Is this true, Dustin?" Ms. Andrews asked. She let go of me, and I moved aside for her. Coming from a household where spankings were the norm for punishment, I could not wait to see the beating Dustin was about to receive.

"Yes," he answered.

The pain in my wrists subsided for a bit while I anticipated his punishment. I may as well have been drooling.

"Get into the bathroom," she ordered her son. "You're getting a timeout."

I was only nine, but somehow I knew that a timeout was not punishment enough. I should've punched him, but the tackle would have to suffice. At least I destroyed his castle.

Ms. Andrews brought us both into the bathroom and made Dustin sit on the closed toilet. She must have seen my wrists because she brought me to the sink and immediately began cleaning them. The bathroom was grimy-looking. The ceiling had a water stain, and the linoleum floor was yellowed from age. The mirror over the sink seemed

permanently filthy. I stood at the sink on a little wooden stoop, one that Dustin himself must have used to brush his gapped teeth. As his mother cleaned my wounds, Dustin and I glared at each other intensely. My jaw clenched and my chin quivered as I stared him down. He wasn't going to win this match. Eventually, the king of the household looked away and sat dejectedly on his new throne. And there I stood, at the sink, victorious.



Contributors' Notes

LISA ARNOLD

graduated in 2007 with majors in Anthropology and Art and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. She is continuing her work with clay and plans on pursuing a master's degree.

ERIC BAILEY

is a junior majoring in Art with a concentration in Photography.

CHRISTOPHER BENNETT

is a junior majoring in Art Education and Secondary Education. He hopes to one day become a concept artist for video games.

ADRIENNE BERKLAND

is currently in her fourth year of college as an Art Education major. She plans to become a high school art teacher after graduating from BSC.

DAVID BEVANS, JR.

is a second-year graduate student in the English program with a concentration in Creative Writing. He attended Bridgewater State College as an undergraduate, and plans on pursuing either an MFA or a PhD in the near—not immediate—future.

BERNADETTE J. BOSSÉ

graduated in January 2008 with a BA in Fine Arts. She looks forward to illustrating, and currently binds books and works with children.

MICHAEL BOUDREAU

is a senior Art major with a concentration in Graphic Design. He dedicates his art piece, "Eternal," to the memory of his friend, Jared.

LAURA BOWEN

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is a graduate student earning a Master of Arts in English. His poetry has appeared in many publications including *The Bridge*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *96 Inc.*

ALEXANDRA CARVARIO

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DESPINA CUNNINGHAM

graduated in May 2007 with a Master of Arts in Teaching with a concentration in Creative Arts and Sculpture. In the near future she hopes to earn an MFA in Sculpture.

JENNA DOYLE

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is an Art major who graduated in 2004 and returned to BSC in 2006 to develop a portfolio in ceramics. She was the recipient of the John Heller Award in 2004. Her future plans include attending graduate school to earn an MFA in Ceramics.

PATRICK FAHY

is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Crafts. For the last year he has been creating jewelry at his studio in Weymouth, Massachusetts.

COLLEEN FARRELL

is an English major graduating this May. She would like to thank her mom and dad.

GRANT FERRO

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NICOLE FONTENAULT

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DAVID GEORGE, JR.

received his BA in Art with a concentration in Graphic Design in 2005. He is currently a student at The Pennsylvania State University where he is earning a BFA in Studio Art with a concentration in Sculpture.

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TANIA HENRY

is a junior majoring in Art with a concentration in Fine Art. She is an international student from London via Tokyo. She loves to travel and hopes to do more after graduating.

CYNTHIA HESLAM

is earning an MA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She also teaches high school English. "A Life of Fiction" is an excerpt of a longer work.

BENJAMIN HOGAN

graduated with a Master of Arts in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. He is a past editor and contributor to *The Bridge* and is currently completing his memoir.

SEAN JANSON

has had poetry published in *Public Spaces*, *The Bridge*, and other publications. His first chapbook, *Benediction*, was recently released. He is an MA candidate in English.

STEPHEN O. JOHANSEN

graduated in 2007 with a BA in English and a concentration in Writing. He is currently tutoring high school students and applying to international graduate programs.

KATE KELLAND

graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology in January 2008. Along with plans to continue her education in Fine Arts, Kate will be working full time for a medical software company.

ALICIA KELLY

is graduating in May with a major in Art with a concentration in Photography. She recently returned from a semester abroad where she studied art and photography in Florence, Italy.

KELLY LABLUE

is a junior with a double-major in Early Childhood Education and Art with a concentration in Fine Art. She plans to teach kindergarten after she earns her master's degree. She would also love to write and illustrate children's books.

SEAN LEARY

is a senior from Whitman, Massachusetts majoring in Art Education. He will be completing his degree in the fall and intends to attend graduate school for an MFA in Drawing.

JOAN MEDEIROS LIVINGSTON

is a graduate of the class of 1972. She lives in New Mexico, where she is a newspaper editor. She is finishing a novel, *Last Weekend at Westbridge*, which was inspired by her experiences at BSC.

JASON NIEMANN

graduated in January 2008 with a BA in Art with concentrations in Photography, Fine Art, and Art History. He has returned to BSC to build his portfolio with the intent to enter an MFA program in the near future.

STACY NISTENDIRK

graduated in 2006 and is currently a graduate student in the MA in English program. She would like the readers to know that this is not a work of fiction; she really does hate olives.

MADELEINE PATCH

is a transfer student to BSC and is a Math and Elementary Education major. She really enjoys finding ways to express herself through photography.

KATE E. PESANELLI

will pursue a career as an educator after earning her MA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing at BSC.

LAUREN RHEAUME

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AMBER RHILINGER

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LAURIE A. RILEY

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KURT M. SCHLEEHAUF

is graduating in May and is majoring in Art with concentrations in Photography, Graphic Design, and Art History.

MARY LAWRIE SHEA

is a graduate student pursuing an MAT with a concentration in Creative Arts. She was a freelance designer from 1985 until 2001 and is currently teaching Visual Arts.

CYNTHIA STEINKRAUSS

is a senior pursuing a degree in Art Education. After completing her student teaching practicum, she will graduate in January of 2009 with the certification to teach grades K-8.

ANNA TAKAHAMA

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LEIA TERRY

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BENJAMIN THURSTON

is a senior majoring in Art with a concentration in Fine Art and a minor in Secondary Education. He plans to teach art at the high school level and eventually at the college level.

CHERYL TULLIS

is graduating in May 2008 with a double major in Psychology and Art with a concentration in Graphic Design. She has been an editor for the past three volumes of *The Bridge*. She hopes to pursue a career that merges her passions for psychology and graphic design.

LEAH VANVAERENEWYCK

is an English major in her senior year.

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JULIANA WILLIAMS

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is a graduate of the class of 2007 with a bachelor's degree in Art. He is now the design director for the Boston-based magazine company, OC101 Enterprises.

Honors

Volume IV

Silver Crown Award

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Twelve Gold Circle Awards

The Bridge Staff

First Place for Typography

Matthew M. Ryan, "Untitled"

First Place for Open Free Form Poetry

Sean Janson, "Think Poem"

Second Place for Open Free Form Poetry

Janelle Nickou, "Janelle: Self-Portrait"

Second Place for Single Illustration Rendering Photographic Material

Michele Prunier, "She Wanted to Choose"

Second Place for Illustration Portfolio of Work

The Bridge Staff

Third Place for Color Cover Design

Sarah Huffman, "The Endangered"

Third Place for Single Illustration Not Based on Photographic Material

Charlie Robinson, "Business as Usual"

Third Place for Two or More Color Photograph

The Bridge Staff

Certificate of Merit for Overall Design

Tom Garafalo, "The Tiny Hole"

Certificate of Merit for Single Illustration Not Based on Photographic Material

Joseph Kolczewski, "Vivification"

Certificate of Merit for Single Illustration Not Based on Photographic Material

Corey Ritch, "Unlocking Doors"

Certificate of Merit for Illustration Portfolio of Work

Gold Medalist, Annual Critiques

2007 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Volume III

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2007 ACP/CMA National College Media Convention, Washington, D.C.

Best in Show for Literary Magazine

2007 ACP/CMA National College Media Convention, Washington, D.C.

Gold Crown Award

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Nine Gold Circle Awards

2007 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Gold Medalist, Annual Critiques

2006 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Award of Excellence for Student-Published Work

2006 University & College Designers Association, 36th annual Design Competition

Volume II

Gold Crown Award

2006 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Seven Gold Circle Awards

2006 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Gold Medalist, Annual Critiques

2005 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Volume I

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Six Gold Circle Awards

2005 Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Apple Award, Best in Show for Literary/Art Magazine

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